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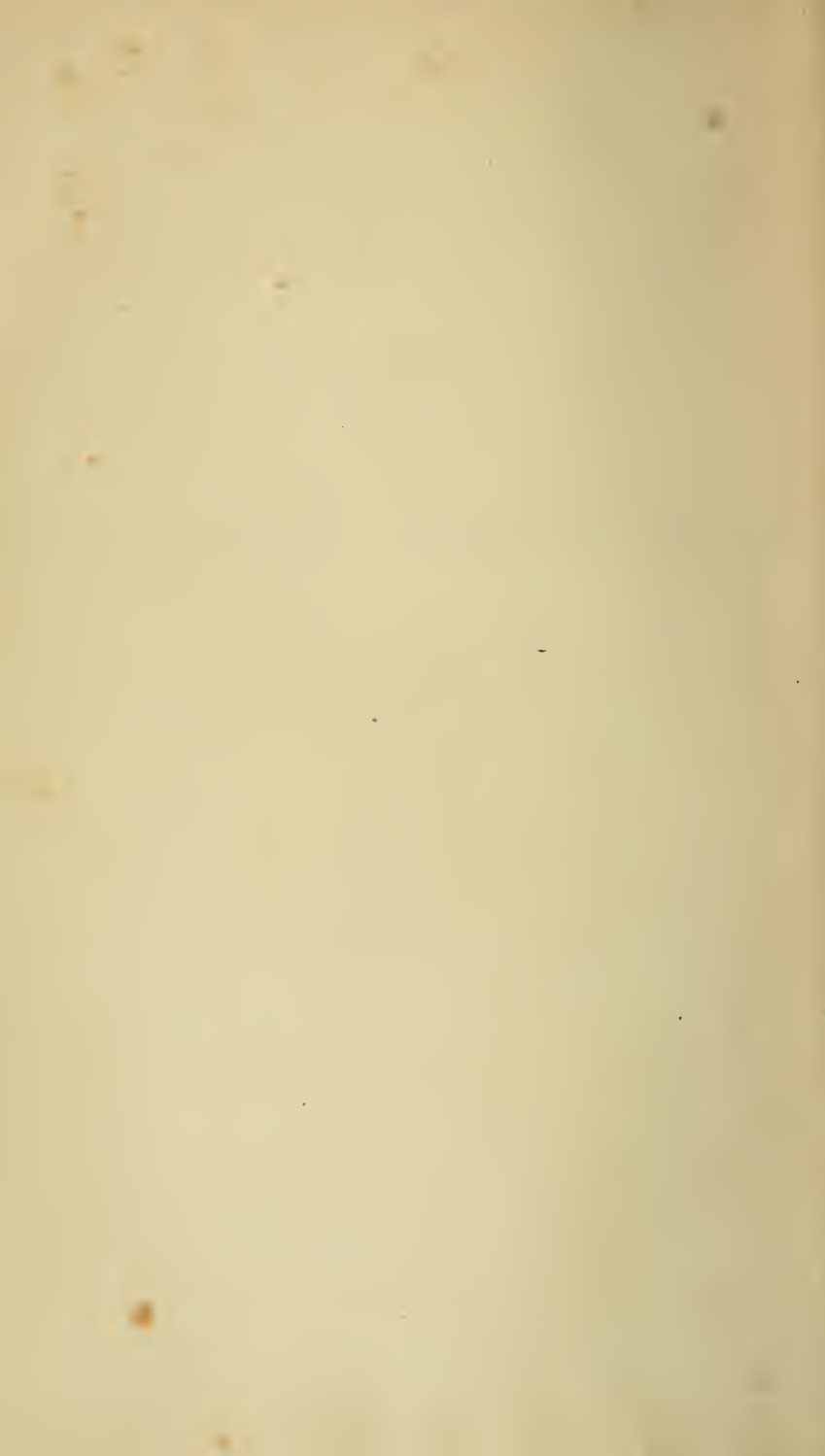
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THE
HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY;
FROM
ITS PROMULGATION,
TO ITS
LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

BY
✓
W. COOKE TAYLOR, LL.D.
TRIN. COLL., DUBLIN.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST! ON EARTH, PEACE,
GOOD-WILL TOWARDS MEN.

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To the Memory

OF

THE MOST REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

CHARLES DICKENSON, D.D.,

LATE LORD BISHOP OF MEATH,

THIS LITTLE WORK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

BY ONE

WHO LOVED HIM LIVING, AND HONOURS

HIM DEAD.





PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

PREFACE.

THIS work was undertaken at the suggestion of the eminent Prelate to whose memory it is dedicated; and has had the benefit of his revision in all but the last few pages. When by the mysterious and inscrutable providence of God he was taken away from the Church and country, which he loved with the purity of a Christian and the ardour of a patriot, the manuscript was laid aside for a time; “though we sorrowed not as those without hope,” yet to read the pencil notes traced by the hand of one so fondly revered, and to reflect at the same time, that these were the latest suggestions given to one on whom he had unsolicited bestowed the greatest kindness, and, above all, the inestimable boon of his friendship, was too heavy a task in recent sorrow. Even now the adoption of his suggestions in alterations, corrections, and additions, has been accompanied with much pain; for every note served only to show, more prominently, the value of the adviser, who had been prematurely taken away. Under such circumstances, it is probable that, the advice given by the eminent Prelate has not been developed always to the best

advantage; let not his memory bear the blame of the defects and imperfections of this volume, but let the censure fall, where alone it is due, on the writer's head. Had the Bishop lived, the work would have had the benefit of his second revision; but, "God's will be done!"

Revolving his mysterious lot
We mourn him, but we praise him not;
 Glory to God be given,
Who sent him, like the radiant bow,
His covenant of peace to show,
Athwart the breaking storm to glow,
 Then vanish into heaven.

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HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL CONDITION OF THE PAGAN WORLD.

"IN the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;" this great truth, familiar to us from childhood, is solemnly proclaimed as the first lesson taught to us by Revelation, and is at the same time the final conclusion to which we are led by our investigations of Natural Religion. Those who have been born and educated in a Christian land, whose fathers have "declared to them the wondrous works which God wrought in their days, and in the old time before them," cannot easily comprehend the necessity for the express revelation of a fact which, from constant repetition, has become as positive to them as the consciousness of their own existence; they have heard that, in other times, and in distant lands, the knowledge of a Creator has become indistinct and obscure, but they can scarcely comprehend how it should have been so nearly effaced, that Infinite Wisdom, which does nothing in vain, had to announce this forgotten fact through the means of miracles and inspiration.

How the fact of creation came to be forgotten, we

are not in all cases able to explain; but that it was forgotten in most heathen nations can hardly be disputed. Though the vaunted Book of Nature was open to them as to us, they did not learn to read therein the power and wisdom of the author of Nature, but went no farther than the striking physical objects presented to their view. According to their reading,—

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Themselves as deities proclaim;

and for the most part they were utterly ignorant of “the bright Original.” Their creed is fairly stated by the philosopher:—

Behold those wide and glowing skies above,
Which all invoke and recognise as Jove*.

In fact, the highest refinement to which the Pagans ever attained, was the worship of Nature itself, instead of the God of Nature,—a system commonly called Pantheism; and it is by confusing these very different objects of adoration, that Pope has fallen into the grievous error which pervades his Universal Prayer, and is most emphatically stated in the first stanza,—

Father of all, in every age
By every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, or by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.

The Pagans, whether savages or sages, worshipped not “the Father,” but “THE ALL;”—to none of their deities was creative power assigned as an attribute: and this notion, which habit and education have led us to

* *Aspice hoc sublime candens quem invocant omnes,
Jovem, &c.*

believe the most simple and obvious of the ideas connected with the Divinity, was that which, when once lost, unassisted reason was unable to recover. "The world by wisdom knew not God."

To explain the necessity of a revelation, we must look to the revealed word itself: it is unquestionably the oldest historical document in the world; all the researches of travellers and antiquarians afford daily fresh proofs of its correctness in all the points where comparison is possible, and it asserts nothing in cases where reason is not competent to judge, which cannot by reason be shown to be credible. Viewing the Old Testament as a collective work, we find that it records two series of events, sometimes distinct, and sometimes blended together, the dealings of God with man, and the transactions of men with each other. The first series must be carefully distinguished from what is commonly called Theosophia, or an explanation of the intrinsic nature of God; Revelation was not designed to communicate to us any knowledge of the Divine Essence, considered in itself and by itself, but simply to show God's *relations* to man. "I am the Lord *thy* God," is the divine address to mankind; we are taught to invoke Him as "*Our* Father," and the great truth thus impressed upon us is, that we are His, and that He is ours. These are facts which are level to the comprehension of all, but Scripture gives no aid to those speculations respecting the absolute properties of Godhead, which are beyond the powers of man's limited capacity, and tend only to bewilder the imagination. Of the latter series we are competent judges;

we can bring the accounts to the test of experience, and to the test of history, which is but the collected experience of past ages. When we find that in all the statements of which reason is a competent judge, the Bible is more minutely accurate, and more directly confirmed by external evidence, than any other that ever existed, we are compelled to receive the first series, its narrative of the dealings of God with man, without seeking any external confirmation, but merely on the proof that this part of the narrative is from beginning to end consistent with itself.

It is not our purpose, on the present occasion, to offer any proof of the historical veracity of the Old Testament; this has been abundantly accomplished by the Biblical scholars of the past and present century; we shall rather examine the sacred narrative of the relations and intercourse between God and man, and in order to do this profitably, we shall first direct attention to some of the peculiarities of revelation which serve to mark its nature and purpose.

“The things which were written aforetime, were written for our learning;” in other words, the direct aim and object of revelation is to convey instruction. We must not expect to find in the Bible, anything calculated either to stimulate or to gratify idle curiosity; we are not to look for any account of the orders of beings that inhabit other planets or systems, or any description of created beings belonging to a sphere of existence unconnected with the human race. Had such knowledge been useful to us, it would doubtless have been afforded; but as we cannot assign any

practical benefit that would have resulted from such communications, we must not be surprised, much less discontented, at their being withheld. Again, we must not look in the Bible for any of those scientific discoveries, to which man is capable of attaining by unassisted reason; undoubtedly, such discoveries have an immediate tendency to enlarge our emotions of wonder, love, and praise for the Almighty Being who has called into existence, and at the same time accommodated to each other, the universe of matter, and the universe of mind; but they produce not such an effect, taken separately and by themselves: they become valuable aids to natural theology, only when they are considered in their relations to the entire system of Providence.

We must expect, in a revelation designed exclusively for instruction, to find the existence of facts declared without any explanation of their causes being afforded. God may be said to appear to us as a teacher, and we stand before him as learners. In every branch of knowledge, it is necessary for him who really wishes to learn, to receive much on the simple credit of his instructor, "*oportet discentem credere;*" as his sphere of information enlarges, and his faculties improve, he will gradually discover the reasons on which his belief is founded. When a father tells his child to abstain from certain actions which may cause physical suffering, he does not enter into any philosophical reasonings to prove that evil will follow from the action; he justly expects that the child will submit to the prohibition on the faith of his

superior intelligence, and in the confidence of filial love; in like manner, the instructions of our heavenly Father must be received by us as "little children," for we are infinitely farther removed from his knowledge than the intelligence of the child is from that of the wisest philosopher. We must therefore be contented *not to know* that which Infinite Wisdom has determined *not to teach*, and this is not wilful ignorance, but a learned acquiescence in recognised superiority of intelligence*.

Hence, when a fact is revealed to us, we are not to inquire why that fact exists, or has been permitted to exist; for such an investigation obviously transcends the limits of human faculties; but we may, and indeed we ought, to inquire why such a fact has been revealed to us, and what is the precise instruction it was destined to convey. The very first verse of the Bible illustrates this remark; it does not explain why creative power was exercised, or the extent to which it was carried, but it asserts the fact nakedly, using the two most comprehensive terms which language affords, "the heavens and the earth." A special reason may easily be assigned for the special mention of "the heavens;" the worship of the starry host was one of the earliest corruptions of religion, and is clearly that to which man is naturally most prone; at the very outset of revelation, therefore, it was necessary to assert God's supremacy over all his creatures,

* Nescire velle quæ Magister Optimus docere non vult, erudita ineitia.—SCALIGER.

and particularly over those to whom his worship had been transferred, either by ignorance or perversity.

The scriptural account of the creation of man leads to the conclusion, that religion is neither a human invention, nor a human discovery; but was the result of direct communications from God to our first parents. This is an important fact, fully confirmed by all the traditions of the heathen world. In every system of pagan mythology with which we are acquainted, we find traditions of an earlier and purer theology, more or less corrupted; they all have preserved the memory of a golden age, when the intercourse between God and man was frequent and familiar, and when, as a necessary consequence, piety and virtue flourished upon the earth. It is indeed impossible to trace the history of false religion, without constant reference to the truths which it perverted: "Such an attempt," says Dr. Hinds, "would be as unreasonable as an inquiry into the formation of language, which should neglect all consideration of a portion of it being co-existent with the gift of speech."

The doctrine of Divine unity, so strongly asserted in the first opening of revelation, is one of the many truths which appear to be simple, merely because they are familiar; but it is one which reason, without supernatural assistance, could not easily, if at all, have reached, and, what is more to the purpose, it is a doctrine which men do not retain without some exertion. The tendency among mankind to multiply supernatural agency is universal, and is only counteracted by the continuous diffusion of sound knowledge.

The Greeks multiplied their gods, until every mountain, valley, and stream had its presiding intelligence; the Hindoos count their deities by millions; the Moham-medans have countless angels and demons to watch over every operation of Nature; and in some Christian countries, saints and martyrs are elevated to the rank of subordinate deities. Let us then inquire whether there be any doctrine in the originally pure religion, which was peculiarly liable to be corrupted by this natural tendency of the human mind, and endeavour to trace the steps of its probable perversion.

The existence of Intelligences, both good and evil, superior to man, but far inferior to the Supreme, is declared in the earliest records of revelation. This doctrine, by itself, does not lead to idolatry, but it gives an apparent sanction to the earliest steps in the process of corruption. The notion of agency having once obtained possession of the mind, all the most remarkable operations of nature would soon be attributed to imaginary superintendents; men would imagine that they "saw gods in clouds, and heard them in the wind;" they would soon assign to these ministering spirits the power of choice in the operations they superintended, and, as a consequence, would endeavour to propitiate their favour by worship, prayer, and sacrifice. Hence the sun, moon, and stars, whose motions mark the changes of times and seasons, would soon become objects of reverence, on account of the presiding deities supposed to direct their paths through space, and, at the same time, homage would be offered to the secret powers and

mysterious principles of Nature, symbolized either by the most obvious means, or the most striking manifestations of their working.

The worship of deified men may, perhaps, be ascribed to the same principle; it might have been imagined that great benefactors, mighty conquerors, or powerful monarchs, owed their fame to some guardian spirit or superior intelligence who directed their actions. To this imaginary being homage would be offered in the hope that he might give his protection to some new votary, but as the name identified the angel with the man, the two would be confounded together in the course of time; the benefactor of mankind would be identified with a beneficent guardian, and the tyrant with a malignant spirit. Such a process of corruption would require no very long time for its completion; it is impossible to read the history of the Christian Church without seeing how very soon the invocation and worship of saints arose from the simple commemoration of their merits, and thanksgiving for the benefit which the Church derived from their bright examples.

The dispersion of mankind must necessarily have increased the tendencies to false religion, because the first colonists carried with them but loose and imperfect notions of truth, and the mode of life which they were compelled to lead tended to cherish gross conceptions. If, as is probable from the scriptural narrative, the tower of Babel was designed to be the centre and citadel of one great idolatrous church and empire, and that the means employed by Providence for the frus-

tration of such a project was a disturbance of the uniformity of religious worship, the angry controversies that led to the dispersion must have greatly strengthened the tendencies to error*.

The scriptural account leads us to believe that idolatry in its earlier stages did not necessarily lead to the rejection of the one only and true God. Though living in the midst of the idolatrous Canaanites, Melchizedek was a worshipper of Jehovah; Abimelech, king of Gerar, obeyed the divine command in restoring Sarah; Laban had images in his house, but he invoked the true God as a witness of his oath; and it is evident from the account of the golden calf, that the Israelites regarded the idol as an inferior deity who

* “The building of Babel,” says Dr. Hinds, “forms the first great era in the history of idolatry. The work is described in the Bible literally as *a tower whose top was to the heavens*, and the confusion as a confusion of *lip*. Herodotus mentions the existence of such a building at Babylon in his time, and states that it was dedicated to the Assyrian Jupiter. Diodorus Siculus gives nearly the same account of it. Now, comparing these statements—the heathen with the sacred—we are perhaps warranted in interpreting the latter as descriptive of a tower whose top was dedicated to the heavens, as to an object of idolatrous worship, Jupiter being well understood by all to be the air or heavens. It is more agreeable to this view, to understand by the confusion of lip, a disagreement in worship rather than in speech. A miraculous confusion of tongues is certainly not what we should suppose likely, from the strong marks which the several languages retain of a common original, and of their difference being the gradual results of the dispersion. But a disturbance of the uniformity of worship is highly probable, considered as the means employed by Providence to prevent the contemplated establishment of one great idolatrous church and empire at that early period.”—*Christianity*, i., 4.

was to be their guide instead of Moses, but not a substitute for the Supreme Being whose presence was still manifested on Sinai*. Even the calves set up by Jeroboam were not dedicated to a new divinity, but were merely symbols of a sacred shrine to be used by the ten tribes instead of Jerusalem. But the wisdom of proscribing idolatry in every form is evident in every portion of the history, for we find that wherever any corruption was permitted to take root, it not only developed and strengthened itself, but afforded shelter for the growth of others.

Every evil that has ever been introduced into society has been profitable to some class of persons: it was soon found that idolatry gave wealth to priests and power to kings; both consequently were interested in its defence, and sedulously laboured to render the system permanent. The people did not resist their leaders; on the contrary, they outstripped them in

* Most commentators are of opinion that the golden calf was designed to be a symbol or representation of Jehovah, and this view of the case would be equally confirmatory of the argument in the text. The chief reasons for supposing that the Israelites asked for some inferior deity are, that they use a phrase inappropriate to the Supreme Being, "Make for us gods," and that they ask for this new deity with a special and limited object, namely, that it should go before them into Egypt. It is true that Aaron, after his guilty compliance, proclaimed the morrow as "a feast to Jehovah;" but he may have done so in the hope of diverting the people from their idolatrous purposes. It may be added, that the Israelites worshipped the calf with the ceremonies usual at the festivals of the local gods of Egypt, and do not appear to have desecrated any part of the ritual appropriated to Jehovah.

forging chains for themselves. We have shown the probability of idolatry having originated in “the worship of the true God by the medium of emblems, and with unauthorized and superstitious rites*,” this is the result of a proneness to substitute external observances for true piety, a proneness which is so far from being peculiar to any age or creed that it has been justly called, “one of the most besetting evils of our corrupt nature.” Men naturally desire to become religious by proxy; to transfer the responsibility of their salvation to others. “In all ages and all countries man, through the disposition he inherits from our first parents, is more desirous of a *quiet* and approving, than of a vigilant and tender conscience—desirous of security instead of safety; studious to escape the *thought* of spiritual danger more than the danger itself; and to induce at any price some one to assure him confidently that he is safe; to prophesy unto him smooth things, and to speak peace even where there is no peace†.” It is, indeed, unjust to attribute the exorbitant power possessed by the sacerdotal order in any community to usurpation, and to cast upon the priests all the blame of the superstitions of the people. “The precise charge against the priesthood in the worst of times should be, not that they originated delusions, but that they fostered, encouraged, and propagated those delusions, which were proved by experience to be profitable to themselves individually, or to the order collectively‡.” Every such corruption

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, Third Series, 26. † *Ibid.* p. 177.

‡ *Natural History of Society*, vol. ii., p. 201.

tended to strengthen the system, by giving influential persons an interest in its defence, and decreasing the power, and even the desire, of all others to attempt its overthrow.

From what we have stated it appears that paganism was originally a corruption of the true religion; that it began in the worship of emblems and subordinate agents, usually, but not always, connected with the establishment of a privileged order to perform the rites of religion, and finally reached the consummation of regarding the emblems as actual deities, instead of symbols, and the agents as independent rulers. This is the account given by Scripture, and it is perfectly consistent with reason and experience; indeed the very same corruptions in kind, though not in degree, have frequently sullied the purity of Christianity, and are among the greatest dangers that menace the religion both of nations and individuals. They are, indeed, as we have shown, natural tendencies, and ordinary humanity supplies no means for their prevention or correction.

In every uncivilized society religion is almost universally identified with whatever form of political government its members may have adopted. Almost all the nations of antiquity blended the functions of the priest and legislator, even when they separated the priesthood from the magistracy. Religion was interwoven into the whole system of public and private life; certain rites and ceremonies were associated with every transaction which could influence the feelings or affect the heart. And this religion was not the less powerful by being often a passive observance of ordinances; on the

contrary, unreasoning submission is so grateful to the natural mind, that men were thankful for being spared the labour of conviction.

So soon as a sacerdotal order was recognised as the mediating body between men and the gods, a principle was established which greatly increased the power of the priesthood, and added to the security of the system they promulgated. It was acknowledged that there were different degrees of access to the Deity, and consequently certain sacred rites and holy secrets began to be confined to a privileged few, set apart from the multitude. "There is hardly any system of paganism with which we are acquainted, that has not some article of faith,—some religious rites,—some kind of pretended theological knowledge,—confined either to the priests or to some privileged order of men, and from which the great body of worshippers is either excluded, or at least exempted*." It was soon discovered that such mysteries gave great importance to the initiated, and hence the secret was most scrupulously guarded, severe penalties were denounced against its promulgation, and the bare suspicion of having revealed it was sure to bring down punishment.

Mingled with every known form of idolatry we find a doctrine which seems to have been a faint trace of the original creed in the Divine unity, that is, the supremacy of Destiny, not only over men, but over the gods themselves. "The term fate, in its original import," says Dr. Hinds, "is something uttered, a decree, law,

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, Third Series, p. 85.

or expression of authority of some kind. To admit the existence of such a law involves the admission of two further truths,—that there is a being who framed it, and that there is a subject to which it is applicable*.” The second of these truths was sufficiently recognised by the Gentile world, for they regarded everything human and divine as subject to the control of fate; but the first was never evolved by them,—they regarded the Word as supreme in itself, the Destiny as self-existent.

This vague notion of fate and the irreversible decrees of destiny, led to the belief that means might be discovered of penetrating the secrets of futurity; hence arose the classes of soothsayers, augurs, and magicians, the impostures of oracles, and the follies of judicial astrology. No more profitable frauds could be devised: in all ages and in all countries the uneducated are easily duped by pretensions to fore-knowledge; the interpretation of dreams is to this hour a profitable employment in England.

From this examination of the elements of which paganism was composed, it appears evident that it contained within itself no principles which could lead to a better system, but on the contrary that all its tendencies were to render submission more slavish, fraud more profitable, and superstition more gross. The only chances of amelioration were from external sources,—either foreign force, or the gradual development of intelligence.

* *History of Christianity*, vol. i., p. 26.

We have one instance of a pagan system being assailed by foreign invaders. The Persians, whose religion appears to have been one of the least corrupt among the heathen nations of antiquity, subdued Egypt, and zealously exerted themselves to destroy the sacerdotal caste, and the system of national worship which that caste supported. Priests were butchered, sacred animals were slain, temples were desecrated, altars overthrown, and religious records scattered to the winds, but the national worship of Egypt, so far from being improved, became worse and more degrading. All remembrance of the symbolical meaning of the emblems was lost, while the worship of the emblems was continued, and the Egyptian religion became not merely idolatry, but a service to the brute creation.

It might be said that this was the result of persecution, and that the violence of the Persians, like that of other bigots, defeated its own ends; but the Egyptian superstitions were subjected to a second trial of a different nature with precisely the same result. In the reign of the Ptolemies the animal worship of Egypt was brought into close contact and contrast with the poetic mythology of Greece, and subsequently with the more severe religion of Rome; but from neither did it receive improvements; on the contrary, it imparted some of its own corruptions to both. These experiments are, therefore, sufficient to prove that one system of paganism could not have been ameliorated by another, even though that other was more rational and more pure.

The progress of intelligence and the cultivation of

philosophy might be supposed to have been capable of producing a great amelioration of paganism; but when we examine the actual influence exercised by the philosophy of Greece and Rome, we find that they produced but little change in the popular creed, and had no effect whatever on the popular practice. In the first place nearly every school of ancient philosophy had its system of secret doctrines, kept as reverentially as the mysteries, and revealed only to the initiated. Whatever their private opinions may have been, they conformed outwardly to the popular ritual, and abstained from contradicting the grossest doctrines of the popular creed. A great portion of their ingenuity was exercised in suggesting allegorical interpretations of the most absurd parts of the popular theology, and hence their religious views are so obscure and inconsistent that it is scarcely possible to discover what were their real opinions. When Socrates was about to undergo his sentence for blaspheming the gods, he called upon his disciples to fulfil his vow of sacrificing a cock to Esculapius; thus exhibiting either his own adhesion to the popular belief, or inculcating the duty of submission to the national religion, whether it was believed or not.

The endless variety of opinions advocated by the several schools of philosophers necessarily tended to produce much scepticism and irreligion; the influence of the popular creed was weakened, perhaps in some instances destroyed. But ancient philosophy could give nothing in the place of what it took away; hence, when it removed any particular superstition it left

the superstitious habits and tendencies of the mind unchanged, and allowed these tendencies to seek gratification in some new delusion, often worse than that which had been abandoned. Thus when the confidence in oracles was destroyed, the influence of magicians, astrologers, and calculators of nativities, was more than proportionally increased; thus, too, when doubts began to spread respecting the interference of gods and demi-gods in human affairs, the belief in sorcery and witchcraft gained the ground that mythology had lost. Nor were these delusions confined to the vulgar and the ignorant; we find that astrology and magic, though prohibited by law, were secretly patronised by the Roman Emperors.

We have now seen that paganism had no elements of regeneration within itself; that the more corrupt system was not susceptible of improvement from one comparatively pure; that philosophy was unable to dispel the delusions of superstition, and that human intelligence, developed by itself, only removed one set of frauds to make room for another. Hence it follows that, without the special interference of a power superior to man, corruption must have continued to increase, varying, indeed, its forms occasionally, but still retaining its strength, without our being able even to conjecture the limits which human degradation might have reached.

The connexion between religion and morality, or, as it is sometimes termed, between creed and conduct, in every pagan system is exceedingly weak; though the gods are frequently represented as rewarding virtue

and punishing vice, the principles of their administration are left in obscurity,—obedience to their laws is never represented as a *reasonable** service. Hence, religion is only a sanction, but not a motive to moral conduct; as such it was taken under the protection of the magistrate, and avowedly made an engine of state. Any change in the popular creed weakened the efficacy of this sanction, and, consequently, the increase of scepticism produced a corresponding increase of immorality. The histories of Greece and Rome contain abundant proof that public and private profligacy followed the diffusion of philosophic doubt. A similar effect was produced when any event occurred which suggested doubts to the minds of the vulgar. The moral government attributed to the gods was supposed to be all but exclusively administered in this life, their notions of a future state, as we shall subsequently show, were too faint to be influential; hence, when the plague at Athens swept away the pious and the wicked indiscriminately, the belief of the vulgar in a retributive Providence was so weakened, that “they cast off all religious and moral obligation.” The mere destruc-

* “*Δουλικήν*,” that is, a service in which the moral duty of obedience followed by direct inference from the principles of the religion. The relations of deity to humanity were never so stated as to make it immediately apparent that God *ought* to rule and man to obey. Their deities were either represented as capricious, or as subject to a law of inevitable necessity, and in either point of view, they could have no moral claim on those who were only objects of casual regard, on the one hand, or fellow-subjects of a common destiny, on the other.

tion of superstition would not, therefore, have been sufficient; it was necessary, not only to remove what was bad, but to establish what was good, else a general depravation of morals must necessarily have ensued. Hence we may justly infer that nothing short of miraculous interference could have effected the intellectual and moral renovation of the pagan world.

CHAPTER II.

THE JEWISH RELIGION.

AMID the general and growing corruption of Heathenism it pleased Almighty God to select one nation as his own peculiar people, which should preserve the knowledge of true religion, not for themselves exclusively, but for mankind at large. Hence we may regard the Jewish dispensation as two-fold: part being designed for the immediate purposes of the children of Israel, and part serving as a preparation and training for “a future revelation and finished dispensation*.” The belief in ministering spirits and agents subordinate to the Supreme Being having been, as we have shown, the chief source of idolatry, we find that the Mosaic dispensation directly called the attention from the existence of such agencies, and fixed it exclusively on Jehovah. God is represented, not merely as the Creator of the universe, but as the special guardian of the Jewish people; “I am the Lord *thy* God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” All the temporal blessings which other nations expected to obtain from their various deities were offered to the Jews by Jehovah himself, and so long as this original character of idolatry was maintained, so long as surrounding nations maintained the tendency to multiply deities as the agents of their prosperity and adversity, the exist-

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii., 305.

ence of a future state was veiled from the eyes of the Jewish people, and their views were limited to the direct government which God exercised over their nation.

Jehovah was the governor, guide, and judge of the Jewish people; at first they had no other king, and the prophet Samuel strenuously resisted their election of a human sovereign. Even when a monarchy was established, the visible sign of God's presence was displayed over the temple, and thus continually reminded the people of their dependence on Jehovah. It is, however, remarkable that this principle was accompanied by intimations, continually growing more distinct, of a time when the sovereignty of the God of the Jews should be recognised by all the nations of the earth.

Judaism, viewed in its relation to Christianity, must be regarded as a preparatory discipline for a better system; "the Law was a schoolmaster to the Jews, to bring them unto Christ." It is scarcely possible to assign reasons for all the ceremonies and minute directions in the Mosaic ritual; very many of them had a reference to the existing practices of the idolatrous nations in Canaan at the time of the conquest, and cannot, therefore, be duly estimated in modern times; but many others were symbolical of spiritual changes and moral influences. The doctrine of an atonement for impurity of every kind is a prominent characteristic of the Mosaic law; the intervention of a high priest, and the offering, when practicable, of the blood of a victim, are the means prescribed for the removal of all

legal defilement. "And if these rites did not actually convey a notion of the one great High Priest, who was to cleanse all mankind from moral defilement by the sacrifice of himself, yet they were calculated to habituate the Jews to that way of thinking, which should render the doctrine nothing strange and revolting, but, on the contrary, highly natural and acceptable*."

The spiritual instruction suggested by the Law was not at first fully developed; it was gradually unfolded by the Prophets, who were sent successively to the Jewish people. In order, therefore, to understand Judaism fully, we must examine its history in the earlier stages of its progress. In the age succeeding that of Joshua, we find the Israelites intermarrying with the idolatrous nations which they had spared, and readily adopting their impure and licentious rites. Grossness was the chief characteristic of the form of idolatry which they adopted, and the principal attraction of the Canaanitish deities was their tolerance of sin; but debauchery brought its own punishment, and rendered the Israelites a more easy prey to the enemies whom God raised up against them. It does not appear that the Israelites abandoned wholly the worship of Jehovah, when they began to serve the Baalim, or Canaanitish deities; the examples of Gideon and Micah show that at least in some instances their first error was setting up as an idol some symbol or representation of the true God, with which the idols of their neighbours were subsequently associated. Hence,

* See *Sermon on National Blessings*, published by Fellowes.

as the evil was of a temporary character, no continuous system of reformation was necessary; Judges were raised up at intervals, and when each of them had accomplished his task, the nation reverted to its ordinary course until some new crisis demanded a fresh intervention.

A new series of events opens with Samuel; he was the first of the long succession of prophets in the Jewish nation, and it deserves to be remarked that the prophetic dispensation begins at the same age as the Jewish monarchy, and that during the time the kingdoms of Judah and Israel lasted, the prophets were conspicuous for their boldness in reproving the crimes of the sovereigns. Though monarchy, as an institution, had been opposed by Samuel, yet Divine Providence had foreseen that the Hebrews, influenced by the example of their neighbours, would demand a king, and Moses had prescribed rules for a sovereign's conduct; but under the government of a king, there was danger of the supremacy of Jehovah being forgotten, and therefore Infinite Wisdom produced means for retaining the obedience of the chosen people. It has been remarked that few of the prophets belonged to the sacerdotal order, or the tribe of Levi; but it must be remembered that the priests were sacrificers rather than teachers, and that they had rarely, if ever, occasion to resist any interruption of the course of rites prescribed by the Law. As we have said before, the idolatry of the Jews was generally an addition to the national worship, not something substituted in its place.

In the prophetic dispensation, the moral and spiritual part of the Jewish religion occupies a more conspicuous and important place than the ceremonial; the duty of repentance is constantly enforced, and the supremacy of Deity over all his creatures kept ever in view. At the same time, the promise of a Messiah becomes gradually more direct and explicit, and his royalty is contrasted with that of the Jewish sovereigns. As the monarchy declined, and after it fell under the dominion of the Babylonians, the promise of a future Deliverer is given more emphatically, and though these promises represented the Saviour under circumstances quite inconsistent with the character of a temporal prince, yet as they were given at a time of physical suffering, the Jews began early to judge of the nature of the deliverance from the nature of the calamity.

When we view the history of the several Jewish apostasies from the death of Joshua to the Babylonish captivity, we shall feel convinced that in each a reformation could only have been effected by supernatural interference. Had they remained in subjection to the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and had no Judges been inspired to effect their deliverance, the memory of the worship of Jehovah would have been gradually effaced, especially as they might have been led to suppose that their tutelar deity was less powerful than the god of the nation to which they were in subjection. This was the more likely to be the case, as the notion of a local deity was familiar to the nations of Canaan; when Benhadad was defeated by Ahab, he exclaimed,

“Their gods are gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” Had the Hebrews remained in bondage to a race entertaining such opinions, there can be little doubt that they would eventually have adopted the gods of their conquerors.

Nor was the interference of inspired Prophets less necessary in the time of the Kings, than the raising up of Judges under the absolute theocracy*. It was not likely that the wishes of a despotic monarch, seconded by the desires of a corrupted people, could have been resisted successfully by the priesthood, even if that body had always been disposed to contend for the purity of the national faith. The ceremonies of the Law would probably have been left unaltered; but they would have been gradually perverted from their original purpose; the mode of worship would have continued, but the object of worship would have been fatally changed. As in the preceding chapter we shewed that revelation was necessary to remove the corruptions of Pagan idolatry, so here we find that repeated revelations were necessary to preserve the purity of Judaism.

The Mosaic dispensation was “a schoolmaster to

* The Theocracy continued under the Monarchy, as Bishop Warburton has fully shown, though not in so absolute a form as it had existed under the Judges; it is important that this should be borne in mind, because it explains the authority on which the prophets spoke and acted so often in opposition to the sovereignty of the prince.

the Jews," by its symbolical representations of a mysterious atonement; the prophetical dispensations continued and enlarged the instruction, by pointing out the Messiah as the person in whom these types should be fulfilled. "Nevertheless, Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block; which must have been owing to some wrong bias, which their minds received from those who pretended to guide them in the interpretation of the Law and the Prophets."

In order to explain the nature of this bias, it will be necessary to take a comprehensive view of the Jewish economy in the interval between the cessation of prophecy and the birth of the Messiah. The cycle of the prophets was completed about forty years after the building of the second temple by Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: a comparison of their writings with those of the preceding prophets will show that they fitly concluded the prophetical dispensation. Haggai and Zechariah exhort the people to complete the temple and restore the worship of Jehovah, but at the same time they announce that a more perfect system is at hand, that "the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former," that "the man whose name is the Branch, shall grow up out of his place and shall build the temple of the Lord;" and Malachi, after an earnest exhortation to "remember the law of Moses," announces that Elijah should appear "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." The chain of prophecy respecting the Messiah was thus completed; and there was no longer any necessity for the secondary purpose of the

prophetical dispensation,—the preserving of the Jews from idolatry,—because from the time of their return from Babylon they were as conspicuous for their attachment to their national worship, as they had formerly been for the facility with which they adopted idolatrous rites. One consequence of this attachment was, that the high priest became the chief governor of the nation, and the administration of civil and religious affairs was entrusted to the same council, called the Sanhedrim.

The law given by Moses was thus made the governing code of the Jews, and, as was natural, it was forced to apply to many questions never contemplated by the legislator. Hence arose a series of traditions, having no definite source or date, which very rapidly accumulated until they became not less important than the original law. The decision of legal questions soon became a recognised profession, and this tended greatly to multiply the traditions, because the decisions were in effect new laws. The same superstitious tendency which in one age leads men to idolatry, will, under different circumstances, bring them to Pharisaism: the common principle is, that a sacred efficacy is attributed to something external to the mind; in the first case, to the presence of some material object,—in the second, to the performance of some outward act. The enlargement of the ritual observances increased the importance attributed to the ceremonies in themselves, and tended more and more to withdraw attention from their spiritual object and meaning.

During their captivity the Jews were probably influ-

enced by the example of their more eastern neighbours, to attribute great importance to long fastings, frequent prayers, and profound meditations, which are even now the means by which pretenders to sanctity acquire fame and influence both in Persia and India. There is a very marked similarity between the description of the varieties of the Pharisaical character as described in the Talmud, and the practices of the fanatics in various parts of Asia; in both cases there is an affectation, not only of fulfilling the law to the letter, but of going beyond what it requires; and in both, this strictness of outward observance is regarded as the perfection of righteousness.

An error of this kind, when it has once taken root, can with great difficulty be eradicated. The vulgar have something visible and tangible to excite their admiration; the penances endured, the sacrifices made, the rites performed, dazzle their imaginations, and win far more respect than silent and unostentatious piety. On the other hand, the person thus regarded is filled with self-conceit, and could not without the most painful of all efforts confess himself to be "only an unprofitable servant." Hence the Pharisees were disposed to regard the predictions of the Messiah as promises of a temporal kingdom, and furthermore, of a kingdom in which they had no small claim to advancement and authority. "It will be readily conceived, that to such men the doctrine of good works being insufficient and ineffectual for salvation, and of the necessity of atonement for the sins of all, must have been light too distressing for them to open their eyes

upon without a painful effort; and that they were likely for the most part to be obstinately blind to all evidence*.”

The wars of the Maccabees appear to have greatly increased the influence of the Pharisaic sect. John Hyrcanus, the greatest of the high priests who wielded the civil government, was a disciple of the Pharisees, and his administration was popular while he submitted to their influence. The misfortunes which overtook him and his family when he abandoned this party and went over to their rivals, produced such an effect on the mind of his son Alexander, that when he was dying, he directed his wife to purchase the friendship of this powerful body for herself and children, even at the price of abandoning his body to contumely and insult. The queen Alexandra followed his advice: “She spake to the Pharisees,” says Josephus, “and put all things into their power, both as to the dead body and the affairs of the kingdom, and thereby pacified their anger against Alexander, and made them bear good will and friendship to him; who then came among the multitude and made speeches to them, and laid before them the actions of Alexander, and told them that they had lost a righteous king; and by the commendation they gave him, they brought them to grieve and to be in heaviness for him, so that he had a funeral more splendid than any of the kings before him. . . . She permitted the Pharisees to do everything, to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient.

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 58.

She also restored again the practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated. So she had, indeed, the name of Regent, but the Pharisees had all the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords." We may add, that it was the tyranny of the faction that produced the civil wars which were only ended by the subjugation of Judæa.

The Sadducees were the political and religious opponents of the Pharisees; they rejected "the traditions of the elders," acknowledging no authority but the written law of Moses. It is not, however, probable, as some have asserted, that they rejected all the books of the Old Testament, except the Pentateuch; "such a tenet would be inconsistent with the office of the high priesthood, from which it is certain that they were not excluded. Nor again, is it likely, that in their controversy with the Pharisees, the latter would have appealed to the Prophets, (as appears to have been the case,) unless the Prophets had been acknowledged as authority by both."

The Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection and the separate existence of individuals in a future state. They appear to have adopted a tenet common to most Oriental religions, the doctrine of absorption. This is a very different dogma from annihilation, with which it has been sometimes confounded; those who hold it believe that the soul after death is absorbed

into the substance of the Deity, and loses all consciousness and identity. They look upon man's spirit as an emanation from the Deity, which will again be lost in his essence. This was a favourite and prevalent article of belief in the land where the Jews were captive, and it was closely connected with a denial of the existence of angels and spirits as independent agencies. But this doctrine, though distinct from that of annihilation, very frequently leads to it; and the Suffeans, who advocate the theory of absorption in Persia, are often led in the refinements of their reasoning to downright atheism. The doctrine ascribed to Sadoc, the founder of the sect, and to his master Sochæus, "the duty of serving God, not like a slave with a view to rewards and punishments, but from disinterested motives," is easily identified with the theory of absorption; for if the soul is to be lost in the Divine Essence, Deity must be regarded as in some degree a portion of self, and there is no room for the distribution of rewards and punishments in a future state. The Sadducees strenuously supported the doctrine of "free will," in opposition to the Pharisees, who believed that the decrees of fate were irresistible; but it is said that the Sadducees lived a more immoral life than the Pharisees, although they were convinced that man's happiness or misery under the moral government of God, depended on his own exertions. It is, however, probable that the vices of the Sadducees have been exaggerated by the Talmudists, who all belonged to the opposite sect.

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 60.

Two other religious parties among the Jews deserve to be noted, although the allusions to them in the New Testament are slight and indistinct. These are, the Essenes and the Zealots; of these the former were probably derived from the Sadducees, and the latter from the Pharisees. We have no certain account of the origin of the Essenes, but similar fraternities are found in every Eastern country where the doctrine of absorption has prevailed. Though the state of *Nirvāna*, or perfect identification of the soul with Deity, is considered to be attainable by death, yet some mystics—by mortifying the flesh, observing celibacy, and withdrawing the mind from all terrestrial objects—have hoped to reach their identification with Deity in this life. Hence it is by no means uncommon to find this remarkable tenet held at the present day by two very opposite classes,—one remarkable for sensualism and profligacy, the other equally conspicuous for rigid asceticism; it is furthermore far from uncommon to see men pass from one extreme to the other without the slightest hesitation. Hence we see that there is nothing improbable in the rigid Essene being closely connected with the sensual and worldly Sadducee, for such an association is to be found in all oriental countries where this most ancient Eastern doctrine has been received.

The Zealots, called also Cananites, from the Hebrew word *cana*, which signifies *zeal*, and Galileans, because Galilee was the birth-place of their chief leaders, were Pharisaic bigots; they declared that God was their only Ruler and Lord; they regarded obedience to the

Roman sway as a crime, and they were equally reckless of their own lives and of the lives of others. Fanatics of a similar kind have appeared in almost every country during periods of great religious and political excitement, and have acquired commanding influence over the multitude by their unscrupulous daring.

It remains to notice a division of the Jews which was political rather than religious—the Herodians. Though these are named from their attachment to Herod's cause, yet the party existed long before that prince was born. The Græco-Syrian monarchs, that is, the Seleucid successors of Alexander, were very anxious to force Grecian customs on the Jews, and they found many who were willing to forsake the usages of their forefathers for Hellenistic refinements. They formed a party disposed to favour foreign rulers, partly in the hope of profit and advancement, and partly perhaps from a dislike to the exactions of the Mosaic ritual. Many, probably most of them, belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, who could only hope to escape the intolerant enforcement of Pharisaic usages under foreign protection.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, descended from such of the Israelites as had been left in the land, when the ten tribes were carried into captivity, and the settlers who were sent to colonize the country, by the Assyrian monarchs. Bitter animosities raged between them and the Jews, from the time that the latter had returned from the Babylonish captivity. They adopted the worship of Jehovah, mingled, how-

ever, with their native paganism, while under the Assyrian yoke; but as there was little religious intercourse between Israel and Judah, after the time of Jeroboam, their knowledge of Scripture was limited to the books of Moses. After the return of the Jews from captivity, the Samaritans appear to have gradually abandoned paganism, for we find they were anxious to become incorporated with the Jews, so as to form one people and one church. Mutual jealousies and Pharisaic intolerance prevented the accomplishment of this desirable object; Manasses, the brother of the Jewish high priest, was driven into exile for uniting himself to the daughter of the Samaritan governor. He fled to Samaria, accompanied by a large train of followers, and the immediate result was the erection of a temple on Mount Gerizim, as a rival to that at Jerusalem. So far as we can discover any particulars of the Samaritan creed, it appears to have been more corrupted by Oriental mysticism than that of the Jews, but at the same time less identified with outward forms. They looked upon rites and ceremonies as symbolical, and did not, like the Jews, look merely to the performance of some outward action. But this tendency to mysticism exposed them to the delusions of pretenders to skill in magic and philosophy; the chief person who took advantage of this weakness was the Simon who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles*, and who is said by the early Christian writers to have deluded his countrymen by the most extravagant pretensions.

* Ch. viii. 9.

Judaism was, as we have seen, corrupted by these several sects and parties; but it was also exposed to a foreign source of perversion, the influence of the pagan philosophy, and especially that form of philosophy taught in the Platonic schools of Alexandria. The founder of that city invited the Jews to settle in his new capital; he granted them the free exercise of their religion, and the same privileges enjoyed by his Macedonian and Egyptian subjects. The successors of the first Ptolemy for the most part persevered in the same enlightened policy, and many Jewish families, weary of the distractions in Judæa, were thus induced to settle in Egypt. So numerous and important was the Jewish settlement, that at length they erected a temple, to avert the necessity of an annual journey to Jerusalem. This necessarily weakened their connection with their original country, and left them more exposed to the doctrines which prevailed in the country of their adoption.

Commerce collected in Alexandria men of every creed that then existed in the known world. The Platonic school proposed to reconcile all these jarring systems by allegorical interpretations, which made them mean any thing or nothing, as best suited the philosophic theory. Abundant evidence of this dangerous perversion is to be found in the writings of Philo, a Jew of the Alexandrian school, who lived shortly after the promulgation of Christianity.

The Law and the Prophets, defaced and corrupted by the several causes of error which we have enumerated, could not guide the Jews to Christ until their original

purity was restored. As prophets had been sent to lead the people from idolatry back to the Law, so a prophet was now necessary to restore the Law to the people. This dispensation, preliminary to Christianity, was the ministry of the Baptist; but, before entering on its consideration, it will be necessary to take a survey of the condition of the then known world, in order to ascertain how far it was prepared for the reception of the scheme of redemption propounded in the Gospels.

It must also be remembered that the *rites* of the ceremonial law were what *distinguished* the Jew; the general principles of morality were taught by all legislators. The personal pride of those eminent for their rigid observance of prescribed forms was therefore a homage to the national pride of Jewish superiority, and each gave strength to the other. This is, in fact, more or less observable at the present day; men are apt to dwell with greater complacency on the sectarian points of distinction in which they differ from their neighbours, than on the inward purity of principle which is independent of sect or party. The error is equally perilous, whether it is manifested by a perverse rejection of all forms, or by an obstinate adherence to ceremonies; in either case, the importance is transferred to the form which properly belongs to its significance. Had there been any sect among the Jews which made a point of eating with unwashed hands, they would have been just as much displeased by Christ's declaring the ceremony to be of no importance when compared with religion of the heart, as the Pharisees were, who regarded the neglect of such observances as sinful. With the

Jews, as we have already said, their rites were distinctive, and therefore the observance of them gratified self-importance. It is on the same principle that the Brahmins of India are negligent of all the ceremonies which are common to the entire race of Hindoos, but most punctilious in the observance of those which are peculiar to their caste. From these considerations it is easy to perceive that the perverting influence of forms, to which all men are subject, was stronger in the case of the Jews than of most other nations, for it was to the observance of those forms that they owed their distinctive existence as a people.

CHAPTER III.

PECULIARITIES IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR
CHRISTIANITY.—THE MINISTRY OF JOHN
THE BAPTIST.

WE have seen in the preceding chapters that there is a tendency to corruption in human nature, arising from a disposition to transfer responsibility for actions to some person or thing external to ourselves, and to substitute some outward ceremony for purity of heart and holiness of life. In the first decline from the worship of the One Creator, when the glory of God was given to graven images, the religion of the heart and affections was chilled, and worship became a mere repetition of mechanical forms. But the same principle which led men to prefer the adoration of a visible object to the spiritual service of an unseen God, led men under other circumstances to attach more importance to the outward rites and ceremonies in the worship of that God, than to the cultivation of those affections and dispositions most likely to be acceptable in his sight. The Pagan and the Pharisee were in one respect similar: both were ignorant that God, being a spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; and while the one degraded Deity by bodily representations, the other equally degraded divine worship by making it consist wholly of material forms.

In both cases the conceptions of Deity were gross and sensual; indeed men generally are too apt to think

of God as "such a one as themselves," and to form their notions of Deity from the archetype within their own bosom. Hence in every revelation of the Divine will, much must be found which men were not prepared to expect, and which was opposed to their prejudices, their passions, and their inclinations. Even when the nature of the new dispensation was foretold by prophets, men perversely interpreted the revelation according to their own preconceived opinions. After the giving of the Law from Mount Sinai, and the awful display of the majesty of Jehovah there exhibited, it is difficult at first to conceive how the Israelites so soon despaired of the conquest of Canaan and were daunted by the report of the spies; but they probably understood or rather persuaded themselves to understand the promise as one that would be performed without any effort on their part; they seem to have expected that the Canaanites would have fallen as spontaneously into their hands as the quails into their camp. They therefore despaired not so much of the fulfilment of the prophecy as of its fulfilment in their own way, and they reproached Moses for their own unreasonable expectations.

Though the Jews had been prepared by a long succession of prophets for the advent of a Messiah, they had interpreted these predictions, not in the sense that they obviously bore, but in the sense most accordant with their own wishes. Such an error might be reasonably anticipated in the case of a single distinct declaration like the promise of the conquest of Canaan, but the prophecies respecting the Messiah were of a

different nature; they were not explicit descriptions, but were for the most part types and allegories which could not be perfectly understood until they were fulfilled.

The peculiarity in the prophecies respecting the Messiah which most strikes us is, that no one of them definitely and distinctly describes the whole character and office of the future deliverer, nor perhaps from the whole collectively could a general view of the dispensation he was about to establish be deduced. The prophecies were interpreted by their fulfilment, and it was not until the fulfilment had been completed before the eyes of the apostles, that they were understood by them.

Had any of the prophets given a precise and definite description of the Messiah, or had the prophecies taken together exhibited anything like a precise outline of his career, it is probable that many impostors might have laid claim to his title, and misled the people. But we have no account of false Messiahs among the Jews previous to the advent, but when the prophecies had been made plain by their fulfilment in the person of Christ, several impostors appeared in succession, declaring that in them were found all the conditions of the character, which conditions they learned from the life of the true Messiah.

The predictions of the Messiah were two-fold, types and verbal descriptions; the former of which related chiefly to his office, and the latter to his ministry. The Jews for the most part neglected the spiritual significance of the types, and, looking merely to the

declarations respecting Christ's ministry, were led to believe that he would come as a temporal sovereign. They were led to this conclusion, not so much by any ambiguity in the prophetic descriptions, as by their own habits of thought; they had formed no notion of a spiritual administration, and they could not comprehend a temporal ministry, which did not confer temporal blessings. Their error was two-fold; they severed the types of the Law from the predictions of the prophets, and they gave to the latter a fixed and definite interpretation derived from the wishes and prejudices of their own minds. The prophecies respecting the Messiah were indeed seemingly inconsistent; it was difficult beforehand to discover how "The desire of all nations" should be "despised and rejected of men," or how he who was summoned "to sit on the right hand of Jehovah until his enemies were made his footstool," should be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs." The Jews took just so much of these prophecies as suited their preconceived opinions, and passed the rest over.

The Law afforded the means by which the apparent inconsistencies of the prophecies might be reconciled; but the Law, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, was made void by the traditions of the Pharisees—its meaning perverted and its purport hidden. Until the Law was restored, the interpretation of the prophets would have been impossible to be understood; the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom could only be comprehended when taken in connection with the doctrine of the atonement. The restoration of the

Law to its original and severe purity was the object of the Baptist's mission, and was preliminary to exhibiting the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Messiah.

The circumstances of John the Baptist's birth, his father's vision in the Temple, his miraculous dumbness, his restoration to speech, and his prophetic hymn of thanksgiving, were calculated to direct attention to the child from his earliest infancy. As he grew up "and waxed strong in spirit," he adopted a severe and ascetic rule of life, like the prophets in the days when idolatry prevailed in Israel. He came "in the spirit and the power of Elijah," though he assumed not the name of that zealous reformer; he resembled him in his external appearance and abstemious fare, as well as in the ardour and fidelity with which he exercised his ministry.

The painters of Italy, in their pictures of the Holy Family, frequently represent John and Jesus together, as companions in infancy and childhood. There is no scriptural authority for any such delineations; Zacharias and his family remained in Jerusalem while the family of Jesus dwelt in the obscure town of Nazareth. From his earliest childhood the persons who surrounded John regarded him as a person destined to become a prophet. The miraculous circumstances attending his birth were "noised abroad;" they attracted considerable attention, "and all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be?" On the contrary, Christ was early removed from Bethlehem, and consequently from the vicinity of those who had seen the angels proclaiming

his birth, and witnessed the adoration of "the wise men." In Nazareth he was only known as "the carpenter's son;" and it does not appear that even Joseph retained any strong recollection of the wonders wrought in Bethlehem, and the preservation of the child in Egypt, though "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." John was "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb." It was at his baptism that the Spirit descended "like a dove" upon the Lord Jesus. This great difference between the early life of the Baptist and of the Saviour ought not to be passed over without notice, because it shows that the coincidence between their missions in after life was not the result of previous concert. John knew indeed that he was the precursor of a Redeemer, but he did not know who that Redeemer was, until it was revealed to him when Jesus presented himself for baptism.

The peculiar nature of the Baptist's dispensation appears in the great subject of his preaching: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Though repentance, that is, a change of mind as well as conduct, was a doctrine preached by the prophets to the Jews, when they called upon them "to rend their hearts, and not their garments," yet it had become obscured by the multitude of forms and ceremonies, which, the Pharisees taught, were in themselves a satisfaction for sin. The Baptist's preaching was directed against this error; he taught that a change was necessary in the inner man; he admonished men "to bring forth *fruits* meet for repentance," to exhibit their changed principles of

conduct in their lives and actions, instead of resting content with a formal observance of outward religion.

We find, then, that there were three systems preparatory to Christianity: the types of the Law, the predictions of the prophets, and the preaching of the Baptist, which completed, by uniting, the other two. The typical meaning of the Law had fallen into oblivion, principally in consequence of the multitude of traditional ceremonies superadded to its simple observances; and this key to the interpretation of prophecy being removed, the predictions respecting the Messiah were perverted and misunderstood. A divine messenger was therefore necessary to declare that the Law pointed to something beyond itself; that the actions it enjoined had a reference to more than the mere performance of them; in short, that they were "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace." When once the spiritual interpretation of the Law was thoroughly imprinted upon the mind, the spiritual nature of the kingdom predicted to the Messiah could no longer present any difficulties to the candid inquirer.

Let us now see how far the preaching of John the Baptist agrees with this view of his character and mission. The substance of his teaching is thus stated by St. Matthew:—"When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children

unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree, therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

We have to remark that this address was delivered to those who came to his "baptism,"—the significant rite which he administered, and which, in the recipient, was a virtual acknowledgment of pollution, and of the necessity of being cleansed from sin. The Pharisees, trusting in their own righteousness and scrupulous observance of the Law, probably regarded this baptism as a mere additional form, another work of supererogation to gratify spiritual pride; the Sadducees probably regarded it with the same indifference that they manifested to all other forms. Hence the severity of the Baptist's rebuke, and hence his immediate declaration of the true purpose both of his institution and mission,—a means of escape "from the wrath to come." In addition to the duty of repentance, which formed the general subject of his preaching, he urges upon them "to bring forth fruits meet for repentance," and not to rely upon their fancied superiority as the descendants of Abraham.

We learn from the corresponding passage in St. Luke that a mixed multitude was present with the Pharisees

on this occasion; publicans and soldiers are particularly mentioned, some of whom were probably Gentiles. Now the Jews, in their pride as "a chosen people," frequently spoke of themselves as the only living men, and contemptuously described the Gentiles as stocks and stones. This is indeed a common mode of exhibiting Oriental vanity at the present day. We may therefore suppose that the Baptist pointed out this despised portion of his audience, when he declared that "God was able *of these stones* to raise up children unto Abraham." As if he had said, "Those privileges which you claim as the descendants of Abraham can only be maintained by your manifesting the same faith and piety as that patriarch; I tell you that those publicans and soldiers, whom you despise and look upon as of no more value than the stones of the desert, may, by a new dispensation, be received into the privileges of God's covenant with Abraham."

This intimation of the admission of the Gentiles into the covenant is followed by a declaration that the Jewish dispensation, which the Pharisees believed to be perpetual, was hastening to its fall. "The axe is laid to the root of the tree." He then states the nature of the dispensation which was to succeed; it was to commence with "a baptism unto repentance," and to be consummated by "a baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire." This was a plain contradiction of the popular belief that the Messiah's kingdom should be temporal, for "a spiritual baptism" was declared to be the great object of his coming. In the next verse, the popular delusion respecting the temporal blessings to be con-

ferred on the Jewish nation by Messiah, is still more directly impugned, for he is described as coming to judge rather than to deliver the nation; and the ordinary operation of winnowing is brought forward as a forcible illustration of the rigid scrutiny he would exercise.

Comparing this account of the Baptist's preaching with the prophetic hymn of his father Zacharias, we shall see that both accord in the delineation of the objects of his mission. Zacharias dwells upon the end to be attained, and the Baptist points out the means by which that end might be gained. Zacharias blesses the God of Israel for having "visited and *redeemed* his people," John declares to the Pharisees that redemption "from the wrath to come" was necessary; the father declares that God is about "to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham," the son declares what are the conditions of the covenant, and states the penalty annexed to their violation, namely, the admission of other parties that would fulfil them—"God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Both agree that the mission of the Baptist was preparatory to that of the Christ, and both concur in describing the Messiah's kingdom as purely spiritual,—but while Zacharias dwells chiefly on the blessings to be hoped, the Baptist brings forward the punishments to be dreaded, under the new dispensation.

Elijah's mission was the restoration of the Law when its rites were neglected for idolatrous practices; John's mission was the restoration of the Law when

the object of its rites was hidden by a multitude of superstitious observances. Hence we may see a reason why more miraculous attestations were vouchsafed to the former. Elijah had to bring back the nation to the knowledge of the One God, and the consequent obligations imposed upon the people; John the Baptist had only to correct the misapprehensions connected with such knowledge,—he had not to establish any new or forgotten truth, but only to remove the errors which obscured a truth received universally.

We find that the Jews did not recognise John as the predicted Elijah; even at a late period of Christ's career, they denied his claim to be the Messiah, on the ground that "Elias must first come." It is, however, obvious that the claims of John required "more than a careless, and much more than an uncandid consideration, in order to be recognised*." Still we know that he was greatly venerated by the people, and we find no instance of his mission being questioned; the only doubt appears to have been respecting its nature and character. Indeed John himself, when pressed by the Levites, denied that he was Elijah, claiming only to be the person predicted by Isaiah. This claim, however, was a virtual assertion of his coming in "the spirit and power of Elijah," for it was in accordance with the object of his mission to dwell more strongly on prophetic types than direct descriptions.

It is not necessary to relate the history of the

* HINDS' *Christianity* i., 65.

Baptist's life for the purpose of explaining the connexion between his mission and the propagation of Christianity. He was sent to accomplish a temporary purpose; and when this was effected, his work was done. Christ having appeared in his own person, the herald of his advent had no longer occasion to proclaim the tidings, and he declared to his disciples, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me." The preparation was complete, the spiritual signification of the Law was proclaimed, and a principle established sufficient to guide the Jews to a right interpretation of the rest of the Scriptures.

The Jews erred in that they expected by natural birth a king and a saviour, whose benefits were to be extended to all the children of Abraham, and to none else. It is to the refutation of this error that Christ's discourse with Nicodemus is directed, when he shows that it is by birth—a new and spiritual birth—that men of whatever race are to be admitted to participate in the blessings of his kingdom: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said, Ye must be born again." This was the great principle which had to be proclaimed to the Jewish nation; they were perversely bent on literal and physical fulfilment of types and prophecies, and even "Masters in Israel" were either ignorant of the fact that these were to be interpreted spiritually, or afraid to run counter to the current of vulgar prejudice. Hence it was by night that Nicodemus visited Jesus, while many of the Pharisees went openly to hear the preaching of John.

In some cases the sight of the mind, like that of weak eyes, can bear the glimmerings of dawn, but will not meet the full effulgence of a meridian sun. Thus John's mission was generally popular, there "went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the country round about Jordan;" but it is very doubtful whether he could have established a permanent influence, even if he had desired it, which he clearly did not. He saw distinctly that his mission was a ministry of preparation, and therefore transitory in its character, and all the peculiarities of his teaching are at once explained by his being the fore-runner, and not the founder, of a new religion.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRIST THE SUBJECT OF CHRISTIANITY.

It is one of the most marked peculiarities of the Christian religion that Christ is *its subject* as well as *its author*, and that it is as the subject he is most frequently and forcibly presented to us in the Christian records. The great object of the Gospels is to exhibit Christ as "God manifested in the flesh, and in that character accomplishing our redemption by his mysterious sufferings and death." They do not tell us why such a manifestation was necessary, nor why our redemption required such a sacrifice,—both are mysteries beyond the reach of our present faculties; but they emphatically repeat the facts, and bring them before the mind in a variety of forms as being fraught with important instruction and deep interest to humanity. "The Word was in the beginning with God, and was God; that Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

The doctrine of an incarnate Deity was not an uncommon religious notion among the pagan nations of the East, and it still exists in various forms of Oriental idolatry; but the peculiarity of the Christian system is, that it exhibits this wondrous manifestation as an exhibition of Divine goodness, while all others make it a display of Divine power. Christ is represented, not merely as God upon earth, but as Emmanuel, "God *with us*,"—sympathising with all our feelings, sharing

in our affections, cognizant of our infirmities, “in all points tempted as we are.” This peculiarity is stated in clear and simple language by the evangelist, St. John: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, (it is) he (who) hath declared him.”

Christ, then, is the subject of Christianity, in the first place, because it is in and through him that God is made manifest to Christians; previous to his coming the Divine attributes were so far removed from us, that the more they were considered, the more incomprehensible they appeared; but he, by displaying these attributes in a human life, brought them at least in part within the sphere of our intelligence, and the range of our affections.

“The world by wisdom knew not God,” says the inspired writer. It cannot be denied that the works of creation, whether viewed singly or in the aggregate, contain irresistible proofs of the existence of an Almighty Contriver, whose power and wisdom transcend the limits of our comprehension, and whose goodness in conferring upon his creatures the benefits they enjoy, we are forced to acknowledge, notwithstanding the occasional appearances of evil that present themselves: but the views of the Supreme Being obtained by such contemplations and reasonings, besides being indistinct in their nature, and purely speculative, have a direct tendency to increase the *distance* between God and man,—to set the Infinite in such striking opposition to the Finite,—that the possibility of communication between them appears to some questionable, while others

deny it altogether. "When I consider thy heavens the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

"But the difficulty is still greater when we attempt to set our affections upon this awful and incomprehensible Being; to address as a tender parent Him, who has formed out of nothing and could annihilate in a moment, countless myriads, perhaps of worlds besides our own, and to whom 'the nations are but as the drop of the bucket and the small dust of a balance;' to offer our tribute of praise and obedience to Him who can neither be benefited nor hurt by us; to implore favour and deprecate punishment, from Him who has no passions or wants as we have; to confess our sins before Him who is exempt, not only from all sin, but from all human frailty and temptations; and, in short, to hold spiritual intercourse with one with whom we can have no sympathy, and of whom we can with difficulty form any clear conception*."

The religion of those who are called philosophers, that is, of those who have formed their notions of the Deity by reasoning from "Nature up to Nature's God," has from this cause been always destitute of devotion; indeed, the more profound their speculations were, and the more exalted were the notions they formed, the less were they able to conceive how there could be any intercourse between a Being of such exalted nature, and so frail, feeble, and imperfect an intelligence as

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, First Series, 160.

man. Their speculative creed “came not near the heart,”—it left the passions and affections untouched, it gave no motives to obedience, and, consequently, it exercised no influence over the actions.

Among the great mass of mankind, previous to the coming of Christ, the notions of Deity were *localized*. Even the Jews, while they acknowledged Jehovah to be Supreme Lord over the whole earth, for the most part believed that his superintending providence was limited to their own nation; and the Greeks, who sometimes invested their Zeus with the attribute of supremacy, still gave him “a local habitation and a name;” he was Olympian, Lycian, &c., but he rarely, if ever, received the epithet of Universal. It is further remarkable, that whenever the notion of a Supreme entered the mind of a heathen, he either abandoned every notion of worship, or addressed himself to some subordinate deity as a mediator or intercessor. Of this we have a remarkable instance in Socrates, who, after the most refined speculations on the nature of Deity, commanded a cock to be sacrificed to Esculapius. The “wisdom of the world,” then, either destroyed affectionate devotion altogether, or turned it towards an improper object, “giving that worship to the creature which is only due to the Creator.”

We are now to consider what was the effect of the new Christian principle, “the declaration or manifestation of God in his Son.” And, in the first place, we shall find that this gave a prominence to those divine attributes which are most likely to win the affections

and to influence the sympathies. The Supreme Being had, previous to the promulgation of Christianity, been sometimes named "Father;" but it was in the sense of creator—producer or author of existence—not in the endearing relation of a parent, whose tender mercy and provident care is ever exercised for the benefit of his children.

We scarcely ever find the beneficence of Deity set forth as a motive for love and obedience by any Pagan writer, and in no instance did the heathens point out the personal and individual relations between the Creator and his creatures. Indeed, we have already seen that they did not worship any god as a *creator*, but only as a being of superior and mysterious power. Hence, though Jupiter is sometimes vaguely called the "Father of gods and men," there is no assertion made of the tender relationship implied by the term *father*. They never addressed him as *Our Father*; there was no individuality in the feelings which the term suggested, and no personality such as would suggest a reciprocity of affection in the relation it asserted. The heathen did not look for a father's love, and therefore did not proffer a child's affections; even the philosophers went no farther than vague speculations which never influenced conduct, and in truth were never pursued with any design of producing such an effect; the true Christian alone looked to the Father of All for a Father's superintendence, care, and protection. Christians alone have said, for Christianity alone teaches men to say, "We loved him because he first loved us."

We are led to view Deity in this endearing relation

the more frequently on account of God's declaring himself to us "through his *Son*." Though Christ expressly declared "I and my Father are one,"—"he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," yet he constantly brings himself before his disciples in the character of a son, thus habituating them to regard God as brought near to them by one of the most tender ties which humanity is capable of forming or conceiving.

It may be necessary to repeat here once for all, that we do not profess to explain the causes why such a mode of communicating religious knowledge was chosen, and still less do we attempt to elucidate any of the mysteries involved in that knowledge; both are subjects far beyond the powers of man's limited comprehension. Our object is to show the influence which such a peculiar mode of revelation produced on Christianity as a religious system; and to exhibit how *the form* of the doctrines rendered them efficacious in producing piety towards God, and good-will towards man, the two great elements of true religion.

The divine attributes of God considered as the Father were manifested *through* Christ, but those attributes which, considering what human nature is, are the best calculated to lead our affections to God were made manifest *in* Christ. Archdeacon Paley justly remarks, "One great cause of our insensibility to the goodness of the Creator is the very *extensiveness* of his bounty. We prize but little what we share in common with the rest, or with the generality of our species. When we hear of blessings, we think forth-

with of successes, of prosperous fortunes, of riches, honours, preferments, *i. e.*, of those advantages and superiorities over others, which we happen either to possess, or be in pursuit of, or to covet. The common benefits of our nature entirely escape us. Yet these are the great things. They constitute what properly ought to be accounted blessings of Providence; what alone, if we might so speak, are worthy of his care. Nightly rest and daily bread, the ordinary use of our limbs, and senses, and understandings, are gifts which admit of no comparison with any other. Yet, because almost every man we meet with possesses these, we leave them out of our enumeration. They raise no sentiment, they move no gratitude."

Now the miracles of mercy performed by Christ meet this very defect of our nature, and bring the beneficence of Deity home to our breasts and bosoms, in the form most easy to be dwelt upon, and therefore most likely to affect the heart. The restoration of her child to the widowed mother at Nain, awakes in the mind a deeper sense of sympathy and beneficence than all the sublime speculations of Natural Theology. This is infinitely deepened and strengthened by the second great view of Christ as the subject of Christianity, his atonement. "He hath loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." In his life and in his death he equally brought Deity into close contact with humanity; and while God was thus made better known unto man, man was on the other hand drawn closer unto God.

This would naturally lead us to consider the second

purpose of such a manifestation; the illumination and direction of our Christian course by a bright example of super-human virtue, seconded by the promise of spiritual aid to instruct and encourage us in our duty. But the example of Christ will be best considered in the history of his life, which forms the subject of the following chapter. We shall therefore turn to some other considerations arising from this peculiarity of the Christian system.

Piety towards God was produced by manifesting Deity to us in those relations, and with those attributes most prominent, which are most likely to stir the affections and win the heart. Every other system is more or less a religion of fear; Christianity alone proclaims that "God is love," but it does more; it exhibits that love in a form so stupendous that we are lost in wonder, and at the same time brings its blessings so directly home to ourselves that we can feel their efficacy within our souls. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."—"Christ loved us and *gave himself* for us." It requires no words to prove that the love of God towards man could not have been displayed more forcibly than by the common truth contained in these texts. But the display of this love is, in fact, the manifestation of God through the Son,—“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

We may profitably take a lower, but a scarcely less important, view of this striking peculiarity. Everybody is aware of the purifying effect which the

domestic affections produce on the life and conduct, and particularly those connected with the relationship of father, son, and brother. The mere repetition of these words in the peculiar dispensation of Christianity has in itself a purifying effect, which fails to strike us because we are familiar with it every moment. But the habit of regarding God as *our* father produces the habit of regarding man as our brother; indeed the Christian scheme considers the latter as the test of the former, for it asks, "If man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

When God declared himself in the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, he manifested himself but to one people; when "he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets," his manifestation was limited to the existing generations; but "the declaration of God through his Son" was addressed to all ages and all mankind. This universality of the Gospel is closely connected with the peculiar form of its manifestation; as the son of Joseph, Jesus, like the prophets of old, would have been a missionary only to the Jews, but as the Son of God, his dispensation was co-extensive with the bounds of God's providence. The Baptist clearly saw this principle and its consequences. "Behold," said he, "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of *the world*." This extensiveness is, however, closely and intimately connected with a personal and individual appropriation of religion. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,

righteously, and godly in the present world." But this application of religion to the individual is greatly facilitated by the fact that Christianity was displayed in the person of Christ. The apostles rarely speak of virtue in the abstract: they constantly refer us to the example which Jesus has left us; they set before us his life as an itinerary of the paths that a Christian should pursue; they call upon us as individuals to follow him as an individual; thus setting Christ before us as the benefactor to all men collectively, and the guide to each man separately.

"From the peculiarities we have noticed, it appears that Christianity preached to man a spiritual God,—not attached to any nationality, whether of language, country, or custom,—the Father of *all* men, demanding the obedience of a child from each, and requiring each individual, separately and for himself, to effect a renovation of all his moral feelings and principles of action. It was the first time that religion addressed itself to man in his personality, and recognised that every individual had a moral being of his own: but Christianity did more; it showed that high responsibilities were attached to this individuality, and to it only, for it declared that the future eternity of happiness and misery would not be assigned by the Supreme Judge, at the day of final reckoning, on the ground of being born in a certain country, or descended of a certain class, but on purity of soul, producing purity of life and conduct.

"The moral value of the individual was thus immensely raised, and the influence of the state, as it

existed in all the ancient systems of civilization, was diminished in nearly the same proportion. The state was no longer all and everything; a wider and more extended sphere of activity was opened beyond its limits, in man's direct relations to the Divinity, and consequently in his relations to all mankind, the children of the same Heavenly Father. A twofold existence was bestowed on man at the same moment; he became something more than a citizen, he became *himself*,—a moral being, called upon by the Almighty to fulfil his duties and receive his reward according to his works; and while his moral responsibilities were thus restricted to his individuality, he received a new being in his moral sensibilities, which were no longer confined to a single state, but extended over the whole wide fellowship of humanity*.”

So far, then, as our reasoning powers enable us to determine, it seems impossible that any mode of instruction should produce an effect at all similar to that which has resulted from the great Christian mystery. “He, for instance, whom we have never seen nor conceived in thought, cannot become an object of the affections in the same manner as he with whom we are familiar. The command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, could never effect the same purpose as God manifested in the flesh, so as to become the natural object of sympathy, of love, and of gratitude†.” For the same reason, “life and immortality are brought to light”

* *Natural History of Society*, ii., 173.

† *HINDS' Christianity*, i., 88.

only through the Christian dispensation; the Gospel alone affords us a rational, well-established assurance of a future state: not only because "God manifest in the flesh" declared the doctrine with an authority which admits of no doubt or hesitation, but chiefly because "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." The doctrine is no longer a mere theory, it is an established fact; "and a truth so experimentally proved, differs as much in its effect on the belief and feelings, as mere precept differs from example; or rather, as the effect of precept, disjoined from the example of him on whose authority it rests, differs from the effect of precept, authority, and example united in the same person*."

Without entering into any discussion respecting the possibility of a future state being discovered by unassisted reason, it may be easily shown that the moral influence of the doctrine belongs exclusively to Christianity. Assuredly there is no chain of argument which would lead to the conclusion that eternal happiness would be the reward of virtuous conduct in this life. "Since God has a strict claim upon man for the practice of *every* duty, no one can in his sight set up the plea of merit, or boast of his services†." We are forced to acknowledge, that "after we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants." Immortal happiness must therefore be a *free gift*, and furthermore, a gift which can be reasonably expected on no other ground than that of express promise.

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 89.

† WHATELY'S *Essays*, First Series, 100.

“Such a promise the Christian thankfully and joyfully recognises as held out in the Gospel, in which he finds eternal life uniformly alluded to, not as merely ‘brought to light’ by Jesus Christ, but *procured* through his means. He came not into the world merely that his followers might *know* of this immortal life, but (as he himself declares) that they might *have* life. The Christian Scriptures do not profess to republish, as part of the religion of nature, the doctrine that eternal happiness is the just and legitimate reward of a virtuous life; but, on the contrary, while they speak of death as ‘the *wages* of sin,’ they represent eternal life, not as the wages of obedience, but as the *gift* of God through Jesus Christ; a reward indeed dependent on obedience, but earned and merited by the sacrifice of a Redeemer*.”

The aim of what is called Natural Religion is to communicate a knowledge of God; but the end of Christianity is to reveal to us “God manifest in the flesh;” to exhibit Christ both as “the author and finisher of our faith.” In this chapter we have endeavoured to show the difference between the two in form, in substance, and in their practical influence. It has not been our object to trace out *all* the important results of this doctrine, but merely to select some of the most obvious and striking, particularly those which best illustrate our meaning when we declare Christ to be the subject-matter of Christianity, the centre of its system, round which all the other parts harmoniously

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, First Series, 102.

revolve, and by whose attractive force they are held together in their unity.

“Let no one then lose sight of, or undervalue, these admirable, these divine peculiarities of our religion, which furnish the only effectual means of counteracting the weakness of man’s nature. Let no one, under pretence of laying a firm foundation of Natural Religion, render the superstructure of Christianity insignificant, by attributing to Natural Religion what Revelation alone can furnish: and above all, let us not,—carelessly blind to those splendid characteristics which distinguish it,—confound this religion with the various systems of philosophical speculation, or popular superstition, which have successively occupied mankind, but keep our eye steadily fixed, as it were, on the Star which stands over the holy infant at Bethlehem, and which has no fellow in the firmament*.”

* WHATELY’S *Essays*, First Series, 218.

CHAPTER V.

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY DURING THE LIFE-
TIME OF ITS FOUNDER.

CHRIST was not only the subject of Christianity,—he was also its author; he taught its doctrines, he exemplified its precepts, he ordained its institutions; he gave proofs of its divine origin by the miracles he wrought, the prophecies he fulfilled, and the predictions he uttered. In this view his life forms a necessary part of the History of Christianity, and also a development of the substance of his religion, when we view him as “leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.” Before entering on any further consideration of this subject, it is of importance to bear in mind that we must expect to meet with a record of many events, the *real nature* of which we cannot explain, but the relation of which to ourselves is more or less clearly pointed out by the Gospel. “Without controversy,” says St. Paul, “great is the mystery of godliness: (1) God was manifest in the flesh (2), justified in the Spirit, (3) seen of angels, (4) preached unto the Gentiles, (5) believed on in the world, (6) received up into glory.” These six particulars are stated as facts, to be received without any discussion as to the means by which they were effected, or the reasons why the same results were not produced in some other way. The historian of Christianity assumes them “without controversy;” his simple duty is to point out their bearing on the general purposes of the religion, their

relations to us and to our conduct. It would be presumption to inquire why these mysteries have existed; but it is our duty to try and discover why they have been revealed.

It is no part of the historian's duty to offer evidences for the general truth of Christianity, because no one but a believer in the system can fully appreciate its history, and still more because the evidences have been already stated by so many able writers, that a recapitulation of them in this place would be an unnecessary task. In the following pages, it is assumed that the reader is as fully convinced of the genuineness and authenticity of the sacred Scriptures as the writer. Consequently Christ's miracles and prophecies will be regarded, not so much as proofs of his mission, as parts of his system of instruction and elucidations of his doctrine.

The life of Christ is set before us as an example; and before entering upon it, the following considerations, furnished by an eminent writer, should be kept constantly in view. "Jesus Christ is set forth by the sacred writers as the perfect pattern of Christian duty. By which we must understand, not that he fulfilled all the duties which a Christian life may embrace, but all which were within his sphere of action. It is perfection in the mode, rather than in the extent which it embraces. It will nevertheless be found, on a very little reflection, to be extensive enough to furnish a mode for the chief part of every man's life, and to be applicable in many points, which would appear at first to lie beyond its compass. Thus, as a worker of

miracles, his example cannot indeed be literally imitated, but it may still be adapted to the case of all. The same benevolence which was evinced in the exercise of divine means by him, may be testified in our behaviour by the use of human means for the same purpose. We cannot indeed redeem a world by the sacrifice of our lives, but many sacrifices and personal denials there are, which conduce to the welfare of others, and in making these we shall be acting like our great example. We cannot save men's souls, but we may help them into the way of salvation; and although we have no power to ascend to heaven by any efforts of our own, by looking steadfastly on him who has gone before us, we may kindle that hope and that faith, whereby we shall ascend to heaven like him.

“Again, there are relations of domestic and public life, out of which duties arise, such as the Saviour cannot be said literally to have fulfilled, because he stood not in those relations, and had no opportunity of exemplifying the practice of those duties. We cannot contemplate him as a father and master of a household, but we see him in the bosom of his apostolic family,—those whom, as if with this design, he calls his mother and his brethren*; and what example could more forcibly recommend the observance of family prayer, for instance, than that which he has so exhibited, by adding to his solitary devotions, and to his attendance on the public service of the synagogue, the custom of praying in private with his disciples†?

* Matt. xii. 49.

† Matt. xxvi. 26; Luke vi. 12, and ix. 28.

“If we consider the sphere of life in which our Lord moved, it will be seen, that although his example thus became applicable to many cases strictly beyond it, yet it was more particularly suited to the exercise of those moral duties which are peculiar to the Christian scheme, viz., humility and forgiveness of injuries. To the heathen moralist, these qualities, considered as virtues, were as new as the doctrines of the Atonement and Resurrection. To the Jew, the latter at least was equally so, and both required that the practice of them should be recommended by such a life as the Saviour led, in which his condescension in dwelling among us was more apparent from his poverty and lowliness, than if he had been numbered with the rich and powerful: whilst his every act of mercy, and his every word of exhortation to the Jews, was a return of good for evil. The closing scene of his ministry was only a more prominent display of those Gospel virtues exemplified in the whole course of it. He submitted voluntarily to a death appropriated to the meanest criminals, and he died praying for his enemies*.”

The Gospels supply us with only a brief narrative of the miraculous events which attended the birth of the Saviour. It occurred at the time when nearly the whole of the known world was subject to the dominion of Rome, and when the triumph of Augustus Cæsar had restored peace after a long succession of destructive civil wars. In the course of these wars Herod, an Idumean by descent, had succeeded in obtaining

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i. 89—9.

the kingdom of Judea from the line of its native sovereigns, and conscious that he was deservedly hated by his subjects, ruled them with a rod of iron. "The sceptre had departed from Judah;"—as a temporal kingdom it was at an end, and the spiritual monarchy predicted by the prophets was now to be established in its stead. An angel commissioned to announce the coming event appeared to Mary, a virgin of illustrious descent, but of humble means, betrothed to a person of the same rank, and announced to her that she should become the mother of the promised Messiah. Her betrothed husband was informed in a dream of the miraculous event, and was commanded to name the child Joshua or Jesus, which signifies a Saviour, because he should "save his people from their sins."

Joseph and Mary at this time resided in Nazareth, but the Emperor Augustus having issued an edict for enrolling all the subjects of the empire, they were compelled to remove to Bethlehem, where the registry of their family was kept. The place was so crowded that Joseph and his wife were forced to seek a lodging in a stable—a circumstance by no means unusual in the East—and here the Saviour of the world was born. A company of angels announced this event to shepherds who were "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night;" they sought the place where the infant was laid, and "made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." Joseph and Mary, being devout Jews, performed all the ceremonies which the Mosaic law prescribed on the birth of a male child; and when these were accom-

plished, they brought him to the Temple "to present him to the Lord." Here the divine claims of the child were recognised by the prophetess Anna, and by the devout Simeon, unto whom it had been revealed by the Holy Ghost "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ," that is, "the anointed one," or Messiah promised by Jehovah.

Simeon gave vent to his feelings in a pathetic hymn, describing the infant Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel." In terms of similar import, inquiries were made for the wondrous child by "wise men" who came from some part of central Asia, where probably the Jews, during their captivity, had diffused the knowledge of the expected Messiah. They had seen that light appearing as "a star," and they sought that "glory of Israel," by inquiring, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him?" These inquiries alarmed the jealous and cruel Herod; he gave the strangers all the information that he could procure, requiring them, in return, to tell him when they had discovered the child. When the wise men approached Bethlehem, the star again appeared and guided them to the place where the infant Jesus resided with his mother. Having obtained admission, they offered their homage and presented gifts, "gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Pursuant to the divine direction they returned home without again visiting Herod, and he, disappointed of gaining possession of "him that was born king of the Jews" by their means, resolved to slaughter all the male infants of Bethlehem, "of two years old and under."

Cruel as such a determination was, we are very apt to estimate the massacre as more extensive than it really was. Bethlehem was not a large town, and the proportion of children under two years of age in any population is but a small fractional part. We may also remark, that his having fixed on such a limit to the age of his victims seems to prove that some interval of time, probably more than a year, intervened between the birth of Christ and the adoration of the wise men,

A dream revealed to Joseph the dangers to which Christ was exposed from the machinations of Herod. He fled with the child into Egypt, where he remained until the death of the tyrant, after which he returned to his old city, Nazareth, where he remained.

In this simple narrative we see that "the manifestation of God in the flesh" is placed at the very threshold of Christianity, brought before us as the first great principle which is to form the foundation of all the rest. It is also shown that it subserved two great purposes,—it gave "peace" to those who "waited for the consolation of Israel," and it invited the Gentiles "which sat in darkness," to come to that "light" of which "the star" was both the type and herald.

Only one circumstance of Christ's youth is recorded by the Evangelists,—his disputation with the Doctors, or teachers of Jewish law, in the Temple. We learn from Josephus that these teachers took great interest in examining the proficiency of youth in the study of the Law; their schools were open to all who were desirous of knowledge, and they encouraged their pupils to seek for a solution of all their doubts and

difficulties. The term "disputing," used in our translation of the Bible, has led to an erroneous notion of the nature of these schools: what we now understand by the expression would not have been permitted; the pupils listened attentively to the instruction afforded by authorized teachers, and only asked questions to obtain explanations of what was obscure. The persons who paid only occasional visits to Jerusalem were naturally anxious to avail themselves of such opportunities of acquiring knowledge, and hearing the most eminent doctors illustrate the sacred writings. Jesus remained behind in one of these schools, and was not missed by his parents until they had advanced some distance on their return from Jerusalem to Galilee. They found him in the school, exciting the admiration of all around by the depth and sagacity of his questions, but he readily obeyed their summons to return to Nazareth, giving only a distant intimation that the employment in which he was engaged was "his Father's business"—the duty he was destined to perform. It is added that during the eighteen years that followed, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Between the birth of Christ and the commencement of his ministry, when he was "about thirty years of age," Judea was deprived of its last shadow of independence, and formally reduced to a Roman province. The governors generally resided at Cæsarea, a city on the sea-coast, and the administration of affairs in Jerusalem was confided to the Sanhedrim, a council of seventy-one persons selected from the chief priests and

most eminent doctors of the Law. Their powers, however, were very limited; their decrees were liable to be set aside, at the pleasure of the Roman governor, while they were forced to yield implicit obedience to his edicts. Nor was this the only galling mark of servitude; a heavy tribute was imposed upon the inhabitants of Syria and Judea; the publicans, or collectors of the taxes, were most oppressive in their exactions, and no redress could be obtained by appealing against their cruelty. Repeated insurrections in various parts of the country at once proved and aggravated the misery of the people. A sect called the Gaulonites or Galileans proclaimed that it was impious to pay tribute to strangers, and submit to a foreign yoke; and these zealots were viewed with such anxious jealousy by the rulers, that their suspicions extended to all who came from the province of Galilee. The Jews eagerly took advantage of this prejudice, and described the Christians as Nazarenes; in order to render them odious to the Roman governors.

Such was the state of public affairs when John the Baptist commenced his mission "in the wilderness of Judea, near the fords of the Jordan." When he had sufficiently "prepared the way of the Lord, and made his paths strait," Jesus presented himself before him, and his superior claims were at once recognised by John. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" The answer of Christ is remarkable: it sets forth that in this, as in other actions of his life, he did, not what was needful for himself, in his own individuality, but what was essential to his

character, of a pattern to the Church, and an example to all true believers. "Suffer it to be so *now*, for thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness." In receiving the rite of baptism, Jesus, by using the plural number, thus showed that he identified himself with the general body of the faithful; and the importance of this initiatory rite at that moment was shown by the "baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire," which immediately followed. A brilliant flame, the recognised symbol of the Divine presence, descended upon him as "the son of man," with a fluttering motion like a dove; while a voice from Heaven proclaimed him the "beloved son of God in whom the Father was well pleased." To this solemn scene, as one of the great "mysteries of godliness," St. Paul alludes, when he declares that "God manifest in the flesh," was "justified, or made righteous, by the Spirit."

The temptation followed soon after the baptism; it was a real, but it was also a mysterious trial, which Christ underwent in connection with his office and ministry. Explanations have been offered of this wondrous incident, but there is no need of departing from the literal account of the Evangelists: the temptation "is a mystery in the same sense in which the whole of Christ's life and conduct is a mystery; that is, contemplated in a point of view that only accidentally meets us, and is not intended as a part of 'the way and the truth*.'" The attempts at explanation do not solve the mystery, on the contrary, they leave the matter more difficult than ever.

* HINDS' *Catechist's Manual*, 18.

Viewed, however, as an example of our exposure to temptation, both as a Church and individuals, and of the powers of resistance we possess, this narrative is replete with instruction. In this scene, as in the many instances of demoniacal possession recorded in the Gospels, we find the agency of the devil described as more immediate and direct at the time of Christ's coming than at any other period in the history of man. Two remarkable incidents prove that this agency was *real*; the Temptation, because Christ was *above* the possibility of being imposed upon by the imagination, and the entering of the demons into the herd of swine, for these animals were *below* it. Satan contended for his kingdom when it was most exposed to danger, nor is there any embarrassment arising from his entering on such a contest foreknowing the result, because investing him with such knowledge is a mere gratuitous assumption. We know little or nothing of the amount of intelligence possessed by the angels, whether of light or darkness, but we may be well assured that they are not omniscient.

The three temptations were intimately connected with the notions which the Jews had formed of a temporal Messiah. The production of food in the wilderness would have been characteristic of "the prophet like unto Moses"—to be lord of all the kingdoms in view from the loftiest hill of Palestine, would have been applicable to "the inheritor of the throne of David,"—and to spring from the pinnacle of the Temple would have marked the Messiah coming in the clouds as predicted by Daniel. The tempter was

baffled by showing the inconsistency of these actions with the revealed word of God; and thus to the Church collectively, and to each Christian individually, the Scriptures were exhibited as the test of what is true and the security against what is corrupt.

Jesus now began to teach in public, and to invite certain persons to become his disciples. They were chosen from the humbler ranks of life, so as to remove all suspicion that Christianity was propagated by human wisdom, and to prove that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. The miracle of turning water into wine, at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, was the first display of Christ's supernatural powers, and it at once distinguished his religion from that of the Baptist, who "came neither eating nor drinking," but was distinguished by the practice of the most rigid austerities. Some report of Christ's preaching, and perhaps of his marvellous works, had reached Jerusalem, for when he went to celebrate the first Passover which occurred in the course of his ministry, we find that he was an object of general interest and attention. Except in his first expulsion of those who traded in the Temple, we find that he maintained a cautious reserve respecting his claim to be the Messiah. Though "many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did," yet, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." This gradual unfolding of Christianity is combined in Christ's teaching, with a constant reference to the circumstances and occasion of his several discourses.

His teaching was progressive and connected throughout; but he taught not merely by his *words* but by his *works*, and nothing is more remarkable in his history than the nice accommodation of the one to the other.

Archbishop Whately, in his sermon on the Marriage of Cana in Galilee, makes the following valuable observations on Christ's miracles, with special relation to the first of them, the turning of the water into wine.

“The first and most important object of our Lord's mighty works is that which every one perceives, viz., to prove his divine authority, by manifesting power more than human, and such as plainly shewed that God was with him: this, I say, was the most important object of his miracles, because without such a proof as this, men could have had no sufficient grounds for believing on Him. Besides this, however, a second object was proposed in most of his miracles; viz., the immediate relief or benefit of the persons for whom they were wrought; as was the case in those numerous instances of his healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and feeding the multitude in the desert.

“The third object of almost all our Lord's miracles was to convey some figurative representation of his character and office—to exhibit some emblem or token of the Gospel and its effects;—in short, as I may say, to *act* a parable. Most of the miracles are explained by Him as having this instructive meaning. And you should remember that an interpretation of *actions* as symbolical, *i.e.*, as conveying an instructive meaning, is (in Scripture), so far from being a fanciful departure

from the plain literal sense of what we find there, that it is, in fact, *keeping to the established meaning* of the language ordinarily employed by the sacred writers. To speak by significant *actions*, may be called a part of the language of the Prophets and other sacred writers, with which, of course, the Jews were familiar. For instance, the prophecy to Jeroboam, that he should be king of ten tribes, was conveyed to him by a prophet's tearing his garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten of them. And the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in particular, were prophesying during great part of their lives more by symbolical actions than by words; as by wearing a yoke, to represent the captivity of the Jews, making a symbolical representation of the siege of Jerusalem, &c.

“Thus also Jesus instructs his disciples in humility, by placing a little child in the midst of them, and by washing their feet. And he points out the figurative meaning of many of his own miracles, as in giving sight to the blind, thus denoting that He came to enlighten men's minds by the Gospel;—in the miraculous draught of fish, signifying that the Apostles should be fishers of men, &c.

“Now the *first* miracle our Lord performed might be expected more especially to answer this purpose in a high degree, and to have a more extensive and important signification than any of the rest; since it would thus form a more suitable opening of his ministry, and introduction, as it were, to the rest of his mighty works. Not that this mystical meaning was expected or intended by Him to be understood *at*

the time, by those who were witnesses of the miracle; but that the truth might afterwards break upon them, when they should come to perceive the true nature and design of his office. Indeed, it is often remarked by the Evangelists, that the disciples did not, at the time, understand what his meaning was; but ‘after that Jesus was risen from the dead, then understood they these things.’

“Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfil the Law and the Prophets: to offer up himself—in a manner we cannot explain, but which is fully declared to us in Scripture,—to offer up ‘Himself without spot to God,’ as a mysterious [sacrifice for the redemption of the world: thereby accomplishing those prophecies, and explaining those types, of the Mosaic Law, which had a reference to that great work; and thus bringing to a close the old dispensation, so as to abolish the ceremonies which had then sufficiently answered their purpose, and to substitute for them the new dispensation of the Gospel, of which the other was a shadow, even the spiritual kingdom of heaven, which He had proclaimed as *at hand*. This, the great object of his coming among us, the miracle of Cana of Galilee was, I am convinced, intended to signify and represent; as, indeed, we might have expected of his *opening* miracle, that it should be not merely, like the rest, significant of some *particular* doctrine, but *generally* expressive of his *whole* Gospel.

“In order to perceive this mystical signification, you must consider attentively both the circumstances of the miracle itself, and also several other circumstances

in the life and death of Jesus, and in the expressions used by Himself and his Apostles relative to those events.

“And first, with respect to the miracle itself, you will observe that several seemingly minute particulars of the transaction are recorded; doubtless not without reason. In a different kind of history indeed, such as many that are extant of the lives of eminent men, entering very much at length into all particulars, we should naturally and justly regard any very minute circumstances that are related, as of small consequence. But it is otherwise (and this is most important to be always kept in mind in studying the four Gospels) in the case of such very scanty and brief *selections*, as we find recorded in these histories. I say, ‘selections,’ because it is plain that a very small portion only of our Lord’s discourses,—of his miracles,—and of all the transactions of his life,—are singled out to be recorded; and a small part again of the *circumstances* even of these is related in the history. Now the writers must have had some reason for selecting what they did select, out of the far larger mass which they omitted. For all that they do record could not, if put together, have occupied as many *days* as his ministry did months; and John remarks, ‘that there are many other things also which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.’ Every thing, therefore, which they do relate is worthy of a close attention, however seemingly insignificant; from its being judged worthy of being recorded (for

some reason or other) by writers who are on the whole so scanty and concise.

“ You will observe, then, in the first place, that the water-pots which our Lord commanded to be filled up, and from which the guests were afterwards supplied with wine, were placed there, as John tells us, ‘after the manner of the purifying of the Jews,’ *i. e.*, for the guests to wash, according to their ceremonial observances of purification, which were necessary to free them from legal uncleanness. These ceremonial purifications they had multiplied, indeed, by their traditions, beyond what the divine law enjoined; but there were many occasions, such as those of legal pollution, contracted by the touch of a dead body, or of the carcase of any unclean beast, and several others which required them, in conformity with the Law of Moses, to employ washing as the appointed means of freeing them from the impurity: water having been doubtless chosen as the outward symbol of inward purity of heart, and rejection of sin, which defiles the inward man, and of which the external bodily defilement is to be considered as the figure and representative. Accordingly the Apostle Paul, speaking of the Jewish purifications and atonements, and of their reference to that of which they were the shadows,—the real and efficacious purification through the sacrifice of Christ,—calls them ‘carnal ordinances,’ *i. e.*, such as are outward, visible, and applied to the body; consisting, he says, ‘in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, which could not make the worshippers perfect as pertaining to the conscience;’ *i. e.*, could only give that outward

legal purity which allowed them to join in the public worship. But 'if,' says he, 'the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works*, to serve the living God?' (Heb. ix. 14.)

"Now it is to be observed, I say, that the water which our Lord converted into wine, was put into those water-pots which were designed for the purpose of ceremonial purification by washing, according to the rites of the Jewish religion. He might, of course, as easily, after having directed the servants to bring water in their other vessels, have converted *that*, at once, into wine, and sent it to the governor of the feast. But He commanded them to fill with the water *these* water-pots of purification, and from *them* to draw out and present to the governor of the feast the liquor which was now made wine. Doubtless this particular mode of performing the miracle was adopted by Jesus, and was recorded by John, not accidentally, but for some good and sufficient reason. And doubtless his purpose was, to indicate that He was come to *substitute the Gospel* for the Law;—to do away the Old Dispensation of outward ceremonial cleansings, and to put in their place the true atonement and expiation of his great sacrifice which 'taketh away the sins of the

* That is, sins. See Heb. vi. 1.; Col. ii. 13.; and Eph. ii. 1—3.

world.' For, as the water which was placed in vessels intended for purification, was aptly chosen by Him to represent the whole of the ceremonial law, so it is to be observed in the next place, that wine, into which the water was changed, represented the blood of Christ, being the symbol of it which He himself appointed at the last supper; saying, as he gave the cup to his disciples, 'Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many.' And also in John's Gospel, 'My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;' signifying by this, as he tells us, his *life*, which He offered up for the redemption of the world. 'For the *blood*,' says Moses, 'is the *life*; and I have given it upon the altar to be an atonement for your souls;' *i. e.*, for your lives: the blood being the symbol of life. And thus too Paul: 'The cup which we bless is it not the communion' (*i. e.*, joint participation) 'of the blood of Christ?'

"The allusions accordingly in the writers of the New Testament to the purifying and sanctifying influence of the blood of Christ, on all who have a lively faith in Him, are innumerable. Peter, in the opening of his first Epistle, addresses Christians as 'elect' (*i. e.*, chosen), 'through sanctification of the Spirit of obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;' *sprinkling* being one of the modes of purification under the law. 'If we walk in the light,' says John, 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' And the same Apostle, in the Book of Revelation, was told concerning the blessed whom he saw in his vision

clothed in white robes, 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

"These and many other passages to the same effect will convince any one who considers them with attention and with candour, that Jesus had in view that mystical signification which has been just laid before you, in changing that water which was the symbol of some of the legal purifications under the Old Covenant, into the wine which He afterwards ordained to be the symbol of his purifying blood of the New Testament.

"It is also to be particularly observed, that Jesus did not (as He might have done) cause wine to appear in vessels which were *empty*, nor direct that the water should be cast away, and then replenish the vessels with wine; but He *changed* the water into wine. This circumstance also is not without its meaning: it indicates that 'He came not' (as He Himself tells us) 'to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them:' He did not *cast away* and abolish, as something evil in itself, or wanting in divine authority, the system of Jewish rites and sacrifices; but He *changed* them for that which they signified and foreshewed,—even the Gospel. He substituted the substance for the shadow, and brought the types to an end by putting in their stead the thing typified; 'the blood,' as Paul expresses it, 'of the *everlasting* covenant;' *i. e.*, of that which was not, like the Mosaic, to come to an end, and be superseded by another, but was to last for ever. Accordingly, since 'the Law,' as Paul says, 'is holy, and just, and good,'—since the Mosaic rites and cere-

monies were truly of divine institution, and were therefore not meant to be set at nought, but were brought to a close only by their fulfilment under the more glorious dispensation of the Gospel (even as the flower is in due time succeeded by the fruit);—this being so, it was fitting that what was chosen as the representative of the Jewish Law, should not be any thing of a vile or impure nature, though it were changed,—and changed for something more precious. And accordingly the water on which Christ wrought this miraculous change, is a thing which is clear indeed, and pure, and wholesome; but was converted into wine, which is invigorating and refreshing, and which was therefore ordained by our Lord as a token, a pledge, and a means of receiving, the spiritual benefit of his sacrifice: the ‘inward part or thing signified’ in the Lord’s Supper, being (to use the words of our Catechism) ‘the strengthening and refreshing of the soul, by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by bread and wine.’

“Moreover, it is to be observed, that the introduction of a change of the Mosaic Law for something better, was not only a thing unexpected, but unacceptable, and matter of offence to the Jews. That Law, though holy and of divine appointment, and having ‘a shadow of good things to come,’ was, as has been just remarked, far inferior to the glorious reality of those good things,—the Gospel-dispensation, which was substituted for it. But this was one of the doctrines which the Jews had the greatest difficulty in receiving; and, indeed, their rejection of Christianity seems to have proceeded in great measure from their

extreme unwillingness to admit that the Mosaic Law was only a temporary institution, and was to give place to something far more excellent: though this was plainly declared by their Prophets. And accordingly the unbelieving Jews of the present day, though professing to look for the Messiah foretold by the Prophets, yet will not admit that He is to abolish or to alter any part of the ceremonial law, but, on the contrary, make it a fundamental article of their faith, that the institutions of Moses are to remain in force to the end of the world. This circumstance, therefore, in our Lord's doctrine, so unacceptable to the bigoted Jew,—the reservation of the more glorious dispensation and brighter revelation of God's will for the time of Christ's own coming, was not left unnoticed among the significant circumstances which accompanied this remarkable miracle. It was indicated in the unconscious expression of surprise from the governor of the feast; 'Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast *kept the good wine until now.*' Thus testifying in the mystical signification (not understood by himself) of his own words, that *that* was best which had been reserved for the last, and that it was a *matter of wonder* that it should be so.

“Another cause for our Lord's thus, as it were, sanctifying water by the miracle which He performed upon it, was, I conceive, an intended reference to the other sacrament,—that of Baptism, which He instituted, and of which He ordained water to be the outward symbol. The water of purification at the marriage feast He con-

verted into wine, the appointed symbol of his blood, to indicate that the water of baptism also shall spiritually undergo the same change;—that the outward sprinkling at that sacrament represents the washing, as Peter says, ‘of regeneration,’ and shall be accompanied, if we are not wanting to ourselves, with the ‘sprinkling of the heart from an evil conscience,’—with the inward and spiritual purification of the blood of Christ—the sanctification of his Spirit bestowed through his meritorious sacrifice. The symbols of both our Lord’s Sacraments were present on the occasion of this his first miracle—water, in which He Himself had just before been baptized, and which He chose as the emblem of the spiritual cleansing and purifying efficacy of the Holy Spirit (as was indicated by the visible appearance of the Spirit descending on Him on that occasion), and *wine*, the appointed emblem of his blood; and into which the water was changed, to point out that it is through his Sacrifice that we are made partakers of the spiritual purification which Baptism denotes. It is also to be observed that it is by baptism we are admitted to be partakers of his atoning blood; in like manner as it was *from* the water that the wine (the symbol of his blood) was produced. And I cannot but think that John, the very Evangelist who records the miracle at Cana, had a reference to this transaction, when he says, in his first Epistle, ‘This is He who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water alone, but by water and blood.’

“There can be no doubt, I think, that John in the passage just mentioned of his Epistle, was referring in

his own mind to this circumstance, which he afterwards (for the Epistle was the first written) recorded in his Gospel history; and which he evidently considered as something highly interesting, important, and significant. He alone, of all the Evangelists, mentions in his Gospel an appearance which took place at our Lord's crucifixion; 'one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water: and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.'

"If you consider and compare together these two passages, and also the account of the miracle at Cana, all in the same writer, you will perceive, I think, that he must have had in his mind the connexion of the water of Baptism with the efficacy of Christ's death; for this was indicated (as he seems to imply) by the mixture of water and blood which flowed from his side; and it was also, I think, foreshewn by his converting water, the outward sign at Baptism, into wine, the sign at the other Sacrament, and the representation of his precious blood. This accordingly is alluded to by our Church in her baptismal service: viz., our Lord's 'shedding from his precious side both water and blood.'

"And it should be remarked that it is the same Evangelist who records both these transactions, the one at the beginning, the other at the end, of our Lord's ministry."

During the first year of the public life of Jesus, we find him preaching to the Samaritans*, spreading his

* John iv. 26.

fame through Galilee by many signal miracles*, explaining the Scriptures in the synagogues of Nazareth and Capernaum†, and delivering his memorable sermon on the mount‡. Two circumstances particularly require our notice: “he taught as one that had authority, and not as the scribes§;” for the scribes appealed to the authority of the Law, saying, “It is written,” while Christ asserted his own supremacy, “Verily I say unto you.” The second incident connected with this virtual assertion of independent authority is, that when he healed the sick of the palsy, who was let down to him through the roof in the presence of a great multitude||, he proclaimed his divinity by exercising an attribute of the Deity; for he not only healed the afflicted man, but added, “Thy sins are forgiven thee;” and appealed to the visible miracle of the cure as a proof of his power of granting healing to the spiritual disease. These circumstances roused the bitter prejudices of a large portion of the nation, and greatly increased the jealousy with which Jesus was regarded by the scribes and the rulers.

At the second passover Jesus more distinctly revealed himself, by healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day¶, and commanding this person, who had been suffering from infirmity of the limbs thirty-eight years, to take up the bed on which he lay, and carry it off as a proof of the reality of his cure. The man was questioned for his violation of

* Matt. iv. 13—17.

† Luke iv. 16—38.

‡ Matt. v.

§ Mark i. 21—22.

|| Luke v. 27, 28.

¶ John v. 1—15.

the Sabbatical law; he replied that he had been commanded to act thus by the wondrous person who had restored him to health; and subsequently discovering that it was Jesus, he made the matter known.

The Jews now called Jesus to account for this violation of the Law. His defence was an assertion of his identity with the Deity in continuing the beneficent course of Providence,—“My Father worketh hitherto and I work,”—and an open assumption of the title and offices of the Messiah. He declared himself to be the “beloved Son of the Father,” whom men should honour “even as they honour the Father;” the giver of eternal life to those who believe on him; the future judge of the world. In confirmation of these high claims, he appealed to the witness which John the Baptist had borne of him; to the miracles he had wrought; and, finally, to the testimony of the Scriptures. We are not informed of the effect produced by this appeal on the audience; but we find that they abandoned all further proceedings for the time, and Jesus returned into Galilee. We may, however, add, that the question of the observance of the Sabbath was more than once raised again, and that the Pharisees were greatly indignant when Christ declared that “the Son of man was Lord also of the Sabbath.” It was in the second year of his ministry that Jesus organized his followers, and selected twelve of them as apostles or mesengers to disseminate his doctrines. To these he frequently addressed himself in parables, particularly adopting this form of discourse when he wished to point out to them the character and growth of “the kingdom

of God,"—that new dispensation of which they were the appointed ministers.

As Christianity began to acquire strength, so did the dangers to which Jesus was exposed increase. The Pharisees saw clearly that he was opposed to their system of interpreting the Law, which was the chief source of their influence; the Sadducees were displeased at the refutation of some of their favourite doctrines; several of the disciples, sharing the popular delusion of a temporal Messiah, were impatient of his delay in proclaiming himself a king; the rulers were jealous of his influence with the people; and the second Herod, who had just put John the Baptist to death, was alarmed by the appearance of a new prophet, whom his terror represented as his victim "risen from the dead." To avoid these perils, Jesus withdrew into the desert country near Bethsaida.

An immense multitude followed Jesus into his retirement; and so eager were they to receive instructions, that they neglected to provide a sufficient supply of food. A stupendous miracle relieved their distress; five loaves and two small fishes fed five thousand persons so superabundantly that twelve baskets were filled with the fragments which remained. The enthusiasm of the people was kindled; they resolved to proclaim him king whether he pleased or not, and when he escaped from the tumult, they sought him on every side. Jesus crossed the lake to Capernaum, exhibiting to his disciples the miracle of walking on the waters, which, being reported by them, still further increased the popular excitement. They sought Jesus, but his lan-

guage was a death-blow to their hopes. In calm but explicit terms he declared that the object of his mission was not to confer temporal benefits, but the improvement of the moral and spiritual condition of man*. He gave no encouragement to their dreams about the earthly power of the Messiah, and held out no hope that they might be realized at a distant time. The disappointment was general: "from that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him." So complete was the desertion that Jesus asked the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, in the name of the rest, declared that they still believed him to be the promised Messiah. Our Lord received the testimony, but intimated that, even amongst them, one would be found a traitor.

Before we pass any farther, it is of importance to direct attention to the nature of the instruction to be derived from Christ's example; and on this subject it will be sufficient to direct attention to the following extract from ARCHBISHOP WHATELY'S *Sermons*:—

"Every circumstance recorded of our Lord's life on earth, is deserving of the most minute attention: not only because both the Person, and the purpose for which He came, were so extraordinary and important, but also, because his personal ministry was very short; and of the transactions of that brief space, but a very small portion is *recorded*. If any one is ever disposed to feel that this or that transaction or observation which we find in the Gospels, is not of sufficient consequence

* John vi. 22—71. .

to deserve a very attentive study, he should recollect, that every one we do find there is one out of a thousand—is *selected* by the writer as being, in *his* eyes, at least, peculiarly striking, out of a multitude of other sayings and events which he has omitted. The Evangelist John remarks, (what we might easily have conjectured if he had not,) that ‘many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; and that if they were written every one, the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.’ But to have given only as full an account of the transactions of those few years, as writers usually do of matters so important, must have occupied, we may be sure, more than ten times the space of the histories we actually have. *These* contain, evidently, only a very brief *selection* of what was said and done during that short but most momentous period. It is, therefore the more important for us to spare no pains in learning all we can from the little that is recorded: ever remembering, that when we are making the inquiry, what is to be learned from this or that passage, we are to consider not merely why such and such an occurrence *took place*, but also why it was *selected for mention*, in preference to a hundred others that are passed by.

“It should also be remembered, that, as Jesus had many great objects to accomplish during his short ministry, and was “straitened,” He tells us, till all “*was accomplished*,” so, many of the things He said and did, were designed to answer *several different purposes* at once. And this makes it the more important

to dwell attentively on each of the (comparatively) few things that *are* recorded of Him.

“His miracles, for instance, were designed, in the first place, and chiefly, to testify his coming from God: ‘The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.’ But they answered other purposes besides: most, if not all of them, had some reference to his teaching, and were calculated to explain or enforce something He had taught, or intended to teach, respecting his religion; and besides this, as much the greater part of them were of a beneficent character, these answered the purpose also of relieving the particular distresses of the particular persons on whom they were wrought. But there was a more important purpose still in this beneficent character of his mighty works: they serve as an instructive example to Christians—they form a portion of that pattern which He set before us, ‘that we should follow (says Peter) his steps:’ that we should learn of Him ‘who went about doing good,’ to ‘love one another, even as He loved us.’ The *miraculous* powers, indeed, which He left with his Apostles, have not descended to us; but as we, no less than they, owe all we do possess to his bounty, we are no less bound than they, to employ the means we have in benefiting our fellow-creatures. As the situation is reversed, so we must reverse in like manner what was said by Peter and John when they healed the cripple at the Temple-gate—‘Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that give I unto thee.’

“To say, however that beneficence is a Christian duty, and that we cannot be followers of the example

of Jesus without practising it, may seem too trite and obvious a remark to be dwelt on. This, however, is not all that may be, by attentive observation, learned from what is told us of our Lord's works of mercy. We may also learn something, I think, as to the best *mode* of practising our charity. There is charity in relieving the poor in various ways—in feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, when mere *want*, unconnected with any other affliction, constitutes their claim upon our compassion; as well as in ministering to the sick, or to those disabled through sickness: and yet it is remarkable that, as far as the histories inform us, Jesus employed his miraculous power, in the one continually, and in the other only twice. Two occasions only are recorded of his miraculously multiplying food: when He fed five thousand, and again four thousand, with a few loaves. It appears that He not only did not, on other occasions, feed by miracle the multitudes who resorted to Him, but did not even support, in this way, the disciples who were in constant attendance on Him, or otherwise employed by Him. When he sent forth the seventy disciples to preach, empowering them, at the same time, to work miracles in healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers, and relieving those possessed with demons, he gave them no power to provide even sustenance for themselves, but left them to be maintained by casual hospitality—‘Into whatsoever house ye enter, eat such things as are set before you; for the labourer is worthy of his hire.’ And on all occasions, He and his attendants seem to have been supplied with the necessaries of life, by the contributions of such

disciples as had the means: as you may read in the eighth chapter of Luke, of ‘certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary Magdalene, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to Him of their substance.’

“This conduct of his must have appeared the more striking, from the very circumstance of his distinctly pointing out, by means of those two remarkable miracles of the loaves and fishes, that this was with Him a matter of *choice*. Had such a notion occurred to any one as that of a limitation in his miraculous powers—that He could work *some* miracles and not others—the suspicion must have been completely removed by his multiplying food on those two occasions. The power *then* displayed served to mark his deliberate design in abstaining from any like procedure on other occasions; and it was marked still more by his directing the disciples, on each occasion, to take care and ‘gather up the fragments that remained, that nothing might be lost.’ This, besides other objects proposed by it, sufficiently indicated his not designing ordinarily to *repeat* the miracle. On the other hand, we not only read, on many occasions, of his healing the sick, and curing the blind, lame, and deaf, in great numbers, but we meet with no instance of any one’s applying to Him for a cure *without* obtaining it. We are even led to suppose that none were ever refused, by such passages as that in the text, where it is said, that of the great multitudes who followed Him, ‘those that had need were *all* healed;’ and again, (in Luke ix.) that ‘He healed them

that had need of healing;’ and so also, He is described (in Acts x.) as one who ‘went about doing good, and healing *all* that were oppressed of the devil.’ The only ground on which any seem to have been shut out from these benefits, was, unbelief: those who, when sufficient proof had been set before them of his miraculous power, yet rejected his assistance, and had not ‘faith to be healed,’ appear to have been the only sufferers who were *not* healed.”

Our Lord was not present at the feast of the passover which took place in the third year of his ministry. “His hour was not yet come:” had he gone to Jerusalem, there was every appearance that he would have either been forced to assume the royal title by one party, or have been murdered by the other. He travelled over a wide circuit of country, and even went to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. Here he was met by a Syro-Phœnician woman, whose daughter was possessed by a devil, and who earnestly besought his aid. Contrary to his usual custom, Jesus did not immediately grant her request, both because the Jews were likely to take offence at the communication of any privileges derived from the Messiah to foreigners, and because the conduct of the woman was certain to convey a lesson well calculated to abate that prejudice.

To the apparently harsh reply, “It is not meet to take the children’s meat and cast it unto the dogs,” she replied, with a meekness that might disarm the hostility of the most zealous Jew, “Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.” Jesus directed the attention of his followers to the

greatness of the woman's faith, and healed her daughter.

In this, as in most of our Saviour's miracles, faith in the person on whom the blessing was to be conferred, is declared to be necessary to receiving its advantages. We have already said that the miracles were not merely evidences; they were also moral and religious lessons. Had they been merely designed as *proofs*, it would have been sufficient for them to be manifestations of *power*, such as the plagues of Egypt inflicted by Moses, or the fire brought from heaven by Elijah. But all the miracles wrought by Christ were deeds of mercy; they relieved man from physical suffering, and they more or less directly typified his deliverance from moral evil. This moral purpose was most apparent in healing those who were possessed by devils; casting out the agents of him who was the source of sin was an obvious teaching, that "the kingdom of God was come amongst men." Such a miracle showed that Satan, no longer, "the strong man armed, kept his palace, and had his goods in peace," but that "a stronger than he had come upon him and overcome him, taken from him the armour in which he trusted, and divided his spoils."

"Hence possibly the necessity of faith in the persons on whom the miracles of healing were wrought; for if these miracles had no further intent than to prove his power or even his benevolence, it is obvious that he, to whom were committed all things in heaven and in earth, did not need the concurrence of any object of power or benevolence. But, as he had made faith

necessary to that eternal salvation which he came to offer, it was fitting that the temporal deliverance should, in like manner, be offered with the same condition, if we suppose the latter to be intended as a type of the former; else the symbolical lesson would have been incomplete, and liable to misconstruction*."

The miracle under consideration was wrought in favour of a Gentile, and, like some others, its efficacy was extended to an absent person. This circumstance is significant as part of its moral teaching, since it shows that the benefits of Christ's coming extended to distant countries and future ages.

In the course of this journey, our Lord gave to his apostles and followers more distinct intimations of his approaching sufferings and death than he had done previously, "saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day†." But, combined with these distressing communications were distinct revelations of the spiritual kingdom which the Messiah was come to establish, and the heavenly glory prepared for his faithful followers. To three of his apostles, the Messiah was displayed in all the glory predicted by the prophet Daniel. On a mountain, whither he ascended, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, our Lord, while praying, was "transfigured;" "the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And behold there talked with him two men,

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 96.

† Luke ix. 22.

which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." This miraculous vision thus showed that the suffering Redeemer was an essential part of the character of a triumphant Saviour, and that his "decease accomplished at Jerusalem" was the consummation of the law, typified by Moses and the prophets represented by Elijah. Finally, the divine voice which came out of the cloud, not only testified, "This is my beloved Son," but added the injunction, "Hear him," directly referring to some doctrine which the apostles were reluctant to receive. Now the doctrine so hard to be received was clearly the necessity of Christ's passion and death, for he renewed the subject immediately after his descent from the mount: "Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men."

Plain as these warnings were, the disciples were still so much influenced by the popular delusion respecting a temporal Messiah, that they began to dispute "which of them should be greatest" in his future kingdom: Jesus at once forcibly rebuked their folly, and at the same time intimated the real nature of his kingdom, by setting a child in the midst of them, declaring, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*."

The life of Christ, combined with his teaching and his miracles, had now set before the disciples the outlines of the great scheme of redemption. The neces-

* Matthew xviii. 2.

sity of repentance was proclaimed, the incarnate God was revealed, the atonement was intimated, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost promised. Seventy disciples were now sent to diffuse the knowledge of salvation, and to prove their mission by miracles of mercy. Their success was greater than they expected; they returned with joy, declaring, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name." Having thus made himself known through the land, Jesus went up to the feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem, "not openly, but as it were in secret." He soon exhibited himself as a public teacher, and the effect produced on the multitude was so great that many inquired, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" The Pharisees and chief priests were alarmed when they saw that "there was a division of the people because of him;" they sent their officers to arrest him, but these were so impressed by his doctrines, that they would not execute their commission. Two circumstances connected with this visit to Jerusalem particularly require our attention; the attempt of the Pharisees to entrap our Lord into the exercise of judicial authority, and his declaration of his divinity to the assembled multitude. There were, indeed, other incidents of deep import to all true believers, but our attention is necessarily limited to those which have the most direct reference to the history of Christianity.

It is worthy of remark, that all the circumstances of the temptation in the wilderness are more than once repeated in the public life of Jesus. The multitudes

whom he miraculously fed, followed him in the hopes that he would "command the stones to be made bread," and forsook him when they found that the miracle would not be repeated; the apostles and disciples frequently urged him to summon angelic powers to his aid, while the Pharisees demanded that he should give them "a sign *from heaven*," analogous to "casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple;" and, finally, friends and enemies endeavoured to force upon him the exercise of temporal dominion; the former, in the belief that a beginning alone was necessary to ensure the establishment of the Messiah,—the latter, in the hope of obtaining some subject of accusation. To the latter class belonged those who brought the guilty woman before Jesus: if he condemned her, they could accuse him of usurping the functions of a ruler and a judge; if he permitted her to escape, they could raise a cry against him for opposing the law of Moses. Jesus avoided the difficulty by appealing to their own guilty consciences: "He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone at her." - All felt self-convicted, and departed. The woman stood alone in the presence of Jesus, who asked, "Hath no one condemned thee?" and, being answered in the negative, dismissed her, saying, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." Thus in one sentence disclaiming all temporal authority, and yet asserting his spiritual supremacy.

The second circumstance to which we should wish to direct attention, is Christ's memorable declaration, "I and my Father are one." What we have to consider is, not so much in what sense these words were used,

but *in what sense they were received by the Jews*. Christ “needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.” If then, in stating an important doctrine he used an expression which was misunderstood, and which he knew to be misunderstood, and if, instead of correcting the erroneous belief, he used expressions which were likely to deepen and strengthen it, he certainly must cease to be regarded as the author of a revelation.

The obvious sense of the words is a declaration of the great Christian mystery, “God manifest in the flesh;” so it was clearly understood by the Jews; for they attempted to stone him, as they declared, because “he being a man made himself God.” So far from retracting or explaining the words away, Jesus repeated the assertion more emphatically, calling attention to the evidences of its truth: “Though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him*.” The Jews clearly understood that this was a reiteration of the former assertion, “therefore they sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hand.”

Means had been afforded during this third year of Christ’s ministry for removing the doubts and uncertainties which many, perhaps most of his followers, entertained respecting the nature and character of his mission. It is, however, certain that the delusion respecting a temporal Messiah was not quite removed even from the minds of the apostles; for St. Luke

* John x. 38.

informs us that when Jesus declared to them, in the plainest terms, that "all things written by the prophets concerning the Son of man were about to be accomplished, that he should be delivered to the Gentiles, spitefully intreated, and put to death;" yet "they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." During this year, also, there was a growing conviction among the chief priests and rulers that the time was come, or at least was close at hand, when it would be necessary for them to take some decisive step respecting the movement which the preaching of Christianity had produced. They felt that the reins of power were slipping from their hands, and that their authority over the people was threatened with ruin. But they looked to the course of events for their guidance; they seemed to expect either that Jesus would yield to the urgency of his followers and assume the royal title, or that his further delay would alienate the multitude and induce them to seek vengeance for the disappointments of their excited and enthusiastic hopes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRUCIFIXION, RESURRECTION, AND
ASCENSION.

“GOD manifested himself in the flesh to redeem the world and atone for sin, to be made the object of a new faith, the subject of a new religion*.” So long as he remained on earth the object was not fully presented to the believer, and the subject was incomplete. We are now to trace the history of the consummation of both, and, as in the preceding chapter, we shall not attempt to relate, much less to explain, all the incidents and mysteries connected with the great series of events, but shall endeavour to select those which best illustrate the nature of Christianity, viewed as a system, when Christ entrusted his apostles and their followers with the charge of its promulgation to all the nations of the earth.

When Jesus quitted Jerusalem on his last journey into Galilee, he left the Pharisees in a state of great anxiety and perplexity. He had openly declared himself to be the Messiah; not, indeed, the temporal deliverer they expected, but a being of a more sublime and mysterious nature, “one with the Father,” “man and at the same time God.” The inconsistency of such a claim with their own earthly notions of the Messiah rendered it difficult for them to comprehend its real

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 135.

meaning and purport; but they must have been at a still greater loss to conjecture the results to which the admission of such a claim would lead. One thing alone was clear,—the universal reception of Christ by the nation would be attended by the overthrow of their own power.

A signal miracle wrought in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, convinced the rulers that further delays would be dangerous. Whilst Jesus was on the banks of the Jordan, his friend Lazarus sickened and died at Bethany, a village within two miles of Jerusalem. The body was buried in the usual manner; many Jews came to console the sisters of the deceased, and, as was the custom, protracted the mourning for several days after the funeral. Jesus, by his divine knowledge, declared the circumstance to his disciples, and declared that he would return to Judea to awake Lazarus out of sleep. He reached Bethany three days after Lazarus had been interred, and, accompanied both by his disciples and the Jews who had come to visit the sisters, went to the tomb where he was laid. At his almighty word the grave yielded up its dead; Lazarus came forth in the presence of the assembled multitude, and being delivered from the cerements that bound him, stood before them a living man.

The intelligence of this amazing event filled the Pharisees with alarm; they inquired of each other, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." The high priest pronounced it "expedient

that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." The decision was approved, and "from that day forth they took counsel together to put Jesus to death." It was even proposed to include Lazarus in the same condemnation; "because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus*."

When Christ came to attend his last passover at Jerusalem, and entered the city riding on "an ass's colt," an immense multitude hailed his approach, spreading branches of palm and their own clothes on the road before him, according to the Eastern custom of receiving a monarch. Most of those who thus hailed his approach were influenced by the great miracle of raising Lazarus; and such was their enthusiasm, that the Pharisees were almost in despair, saying among themselves, "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the whole world is gone after him†."

This excitement, so displeasing to the Pharisees, appears to have given fresh aliment to the error common among the disciples, that Jesus would embrace some public opportunity of proclaiming himself the sovereign and deliverer of Israel; and hence immediately after the triumph he repeated the prediction of his death. At the last supper he repeated this prophecy, adding, that he should be betrayed by one of the apostles, and deserted by the rest. Peter confidently declared that his allegiance would never waver, and was rebuked by the further declaration, that he

* John xii. 11.

† John xii. 19.

would deny his master. It is clear from subsequent circumstances that Peter still expected a temporal kingdom; and even if he believed that Jesus would be exposed to dangers and sufferings, he supposed that these would only be preparatory to a signal and final triumph. Both on this occasion and when Christ washed the feet of his disciples, we can distinctly see that Peter's mind was agitated by the difficulty of reconciling what he saw and heard with his own preconceived notions.

This view of Peter's doubtful mind enables us to understand, in some degree, the proceedings of Judas. He was the treasurer of the apostles, if such a name can be given to the bearer of their scanty common purse. He had recently expressed annoyance that the precious ointment, with which Mary anointed Jesus, had not been sold, and the money "given to the poor;" that is, probably, added to the common stock from which the poor disciples were supported. The gentle rebuke which he received seems to have aggravated his impatience of the delay in effecting a revolution from which he expected wealth and power. To force on a crisis was, therefore, the policy most likely for him to adopt, and this could best be done by placing Christ and the rulers in such circumstances that one or the other must prevail.

Jesus himself showed that he was aware of the treachery which Judas meditated, and pointed him out to the rest of the apostles, who seem not to have understood what was communicated to them. The extent of the treachery for which he covenanted was,

that he would show to the officers the place where Jesus could be arrested, and that he would identify his person. There are strong reasons for believing that he was far from supposing he thus betrayed his master to death. The sum for which he stipulated was paltry* (a far less sum, probably, than he might in a short time embezzle from the bag of which he was keeper); in the act of betrayal he recognised Jesus as his master, and saluted him as his friend, needless aggravations of treachery if a mere betrayal were designed; he attended the trial, and when he saw "that he was condemned," his guilt and folly became apparent, and he was overwhelmed with horror and remorse. The moment that Christ showed his purpose of submitting, and was delivered over to the Roman governor, Judas brought back his hire to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." It is probable, indeed, that his death preceded that of his victim.

From the entire narrative, it is evident that Judas did not expect that his conduct would have led to the result which it produced; had some signal miracle convinced the Sanhedrim, or delivered Jesus from their power and exhibited him as a king to the people, Judas might have expected a rich reward for bringing matters to a speedy issue; but the submission of his Lord never entered into his thoughts, and hence his despair at this unexpected termination of his conduct.

* Thirty pieces of silver, equal to about three pounds of our money.

Passing over all those circumstances of the Passion-week, which afford themes of deep interest and meditation to every pious mind, we must now turn to the trial before the Sanhedrim, or Council, as illustrating the perplexity occasioned by the peculiar nature of the claims made by the Lord Jesus. Many false witnesses came, but none were found whose evidence could be made the foundation of a criminal charge. The only point on which they could even ask for an answer was his very early declaration, "Destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days." The high priest was forced to have recourse to the prisoner himself, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus not only asserted his claim, but referred them to the sign mentioned by the prophet Daniel, and which they had so often sought from him in the course of his career, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." This explicit declaration was received with a shout, that he had spoken blasphemy, and he was unanimously condemned by the council.

Various reasons may be assigned for the Jewish rulers transferring the odium of Christ's death to the Roman governor instead of slaying him themselves, as they subsequently did St. Stephen. It is true that the power of life and death belonged only to the Roman tribunals, and that putting Jesus to death by the decree of the council would have been a violation of law; but the more bigoted of the Pharisees on several occasions excited tumults to remove an obnoxious individual in

the excitement of popular commotion. It is probable that such a deed of illegal violence was at one time contemplated in the case of our blessed Lord, but that further consideration induced the Jewish leaders to abandon their design. Perhaps a belief in his miraculous power, forcing itself upon their minds in spite of themselves, was one motive; but certainly not the least influential was the unpopularity of a person endowed with such powers submitting to be brought before the Roman tribunal. It does not appear that the populace had any share in the trial before the council; but from the moment that Jesus was brought before Pilate, the mob of Jerusalem thirsted for his blood. Pilate would have saved him; for though Christ was accused of aiming at royalty, he soon showed the governor that the kingdom he claimed was "not of this world;" but the chief priests terrified him by declaring, that if he spared Jesus, he was no friend to Cæsar; and Pilate, who well knew the character of the jealous and cruel Tiberius Cæsar, who then held the empire, was terrified into pronouncing sentence. He took revenge by commanding that the inscription on the cross should describe the sufferer as "king of the Jews."

It is unnecessary to repeat here the circumstances of the crucifixion, the rending of the rocks, the tearing of the veil, the opening of the tombs, or the miraculous darkness; but it is of importance to see that the delusion respecting a temporal Messiah was the animating principle of the popular fury to the very last. All the reproaches addressed to the dying Saviour refer to this matter, and to it alone. "If he be the king of Israel,

let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." The impenitent thief who was crucified with him adopted the same language, and the very bitterness of these sarcasms shows how general were the expectations which his submission to the Roman power had disappointed.

The atonement was complete; the great mystery of redemption was accomplished. These are themes on which we would willingly dilate with awe and gratitude, but which we must leave to be subjects of meditation. We may, however, remark that a less severe shock would scarcely have destroyed the prevalent delusion respecting the temporal nature of Christ's kingdom. From the very commencement of his career, the general multitude, his more immediate followers, and even the apostles themselves, expected that some event or other would produce such a crisis as to compel Jesus to proclaim himself sovereign of the nation. Delay sickened their hearts, but did not destroy their hopes; even after his arrest Peter and another disciple followed to the house of the high priest, apparently uncertain as to the issue. Peter's repeated denials of his master could only have been designed to serve a temporary purpose, to protect himself while the inquiry was conducted before the council, for he must have been aware that if his having been an apostle could be made the subject of charge, abundant evidence could be procured to establish the fact. From the moment, however, that Christ submitted to be sent before a Roman tribunal despair seems to have seized on the heart of all his

followers; we do not find that any one of them mingled with the crowd, which assembled round the judgment-seat of Pilate. He to whom they looked for a triumphant deliverance from the yoke of the stranger, had voluntarily yielded himself to the tyranny of that stranger; such a disappointment produced more than doubt; it filled their hearts with dismay and despair.

The cross was the most despicable and revolting instrument of punishment in the ancient world; it was proverbially the terror of the meanest slave; he who was thus punished was deemed "a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." The contrast between such a sufferer, and the victorious deliverer, who was to rule over the chosen people, and give them empire over the whole earth, can hardly be conceived by those who are not acquainted with the extravagant notions of temporal magnificence, which the Jews formed respecting the kingdom of the Messiah. We may add, that Christ's voluntary submission to such a degradation, if any of the disciples believed it to be voluntary, as no doubt many of them did, instead of conciliating their regard, must have kindled their rage. "He might have saved himself and us," would be their secret thought, "but through inexplicable perversity he has allowed the opportunity to slip away, and has consummated his ruin and our own."

Nor were such feelings confined to the disciples; we find traces of uncertainty, curiosity, and an anxiety about what was to come next, in the multitude assem-

bled round the cross. The pathetic exclamation, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabaethani," was mistaken for a call on Elias, and the wavering multitude called for quiet, to see "whether Elias would come to save him." Christ's last cry of parting agony ended this pause of mingled doubt and expectation; the convulsions of nature which followed induced some to exclaim, with the centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God;" but no one recognised the sufferer as the Messiah.

The interment of Christ's body in "the grave of the rich" was not resisted by the Jewish rulers, and this may, probably, have arisen from an uneasy suspicion that after all, the pretensions of Jesus had some foundation in reality. Their application to Pilate for a guard, though cautiously worded, appears to evince some such feeling of uneasiness: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first." The accurate remembrance of what Christ had predicted appears to justify our belief that a lurking fear of his really rising again from the dead, was as much the cause of these precautions as dread of the disciples, who were notoriously disheartened and dismayed.

The Resurrection took place in the presence of the astonished guard; it was witnessed by none of the disciples; the body was gone when the women, "last at the cross and first at the sepulchre," came to per-

form some of the rites which, according to Jewish custom, were continued after the body had been consigned to the tomb. They came "before it was dawn," in sorrow and in fear, for it was dangerous to lament over one who had been put to death as a public malefactor. The intelligence of the event increased the perplexity and confusion into which the apostles were thrown. Their feelings on the occasion are well depicted in the conversation which the two disciples, on their road to Emmaus, had with Jesus, before they recognised his identity. "We trusted that it had been HE which should have redeemed Israel; and, beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done." They had regarded him as a temporal Messiah, and their notion of the resurrection was combined with an expectation of his openly assuming his kingdom, coming, as Daniel had foretold, "in the clouds of heaven." The third day, on which they expected such a manifestation, was wearing late, and, as the manifestation had not yet appeared, they spoke of the report made by the women as something which "astonished" them, and for which they were unable to account. Humanly speaking, the delusion which the crucifixion had nearly dispelled would have been revived in tenfold strength by the resurrection, had that fact been revealed by any great and portentous sign to the Jewish nation, or even to the whole body of disciples. Communicated as it was by slow degrees, and after intervals of time, to the apostles and disciples in separate parties, we find the leaven of their old belief

and expectations breaking out in the question, "Lord, wilt thou, at this time, restore again the kingdom to Israel*?" So hard was it for them, after all they had heard and all they had witnessed, to form a conception of a purely spiritual kingdom.

Our Lord's reply to this question, which shows that at least some of the apostles were nearly as much in the dark respecting several of the main truths of redemption, as the Jews who had crucified him, leads us at once to the consummation of the Christian system. "It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." And to show that this promise was the completion of the divine economy of Christ's manifestation, "when he had spoken, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."

We have already said that Christianity cannot properly be said to have existed as a religion until the entire subject of Christianity had been completed, that is, until "God manifest in the flesh," had returned to "the glory which he had with the Father, before the world was." It was only then that "the mystery of Godliness" was consummated. There remained the explanation, not of the mystery itself, but of its relation to mankind. This was the office of the

* Acts i. 6.

Comforter; "He shall *teach* you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance," was the description given of the purport of the Holy Ghost's descent. "God manifested himself in the Spirit to instruct men in what He had done, and to teach them what they were bound in consequence of this to do*."

In addition, however, to the complete manifestation of God in the flesh, reconciling the world to himself, and the pattern set to believers by our Lord's holy life, there were some preparations made for the establishment of Christianity, while its subject and author was yet on earth, which deserve our attention. Twelve apostles and seventy disciples had been appointed to spread the knowledge of Christ's kingdom, and the commission of the apostles was renewed before the ascension, with the additional charge that they should act as "witnesses." Hence we find that immediately after the ascension, and before the descent of the Holy Ghost, Matthias was elected to fill the place of Judas, and complete the number of those to whom the special charge of bearing evidence had been entrusted.

Two sacraments were instituted, and a form of prayer taught by Christ. The sacrament of the Eucharist, commemorative and emblematic of the death of the Redeemer, and the benefits purchased for us by his sacrifice, and the sacrament of Baptism, which was the outward sign of that "death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness," with which the

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 135.

Christian life must commence, were the only perpetual ordinances which Christ established for his church. The prayer, commonly "The Lord's Prayer," was primarily designed to suit the circumstances in which the disciples were placed during Christ's ministry on earth, though it "involved a prophetic allusion and adaptation to the successive trials of the Church*."

Finally, our Lord gave to his disciples certain prophecies, which the Holy Spirit "called to their remembrance," and of these the most important were the predictions relating to the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem. We have more than once seen that the two great mistakes into which the Jews, including the apostles themselves, had fallen respecting the Messiah, were that his kingdom should be temporal, and that the benefits of his coming should be confined to the Jews. We have shown that it was scarcely possible for anything short of Christ's ignominious death on the cross to have removed the former delusion, and we can hardly conceive that the second would have been abandoned until the Jew could no longer boast that "In Judah is God known, his name is great in Israel: in Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion†." So long as any of the disciples regarded Jerusalem as "the eternal city," and the temple as a

* On the subject of the Lord's Prayer, see DR. HINDS' *History of Christianity*, i., 157—173.

† Psalm LXXvi. 1, 2.

monument which never would perish, so long must he have clung to the perpetuity of that dispensation with which both were intimately connected. But from the moment that the disciple learned to believe that the existence of these outward signs of the old covenant was dated, he began to fix his mind more intently on the peculiar character of the Christian, or new dispensation, and under the guidance of God's spirit, to discover more and more of its universality.

It has sometimes been asked why our Lord gave those prophecies respecting the conversion of the Gentile world to his disciples, when they were not intelligible without a subsequent and additional revelation. To this it may be answered, that these prophecies were interpreted by the event, and therefore became at once a confirmation of the faith of the apostles, and a guide for their conduct in circumstances peculiarly requiring direction. If they had regarded the call of the Gentiles as a new thing, all their prejudices as Jews would have been excited, and they would most probably have shrunk from completing the conversions which they had begun. But the remembrance of these predictions showed them that the Gentiles were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God," and thus encouraged them to pursue the course of proselytism to which they perceived that they had been guided by providence.

Historically, indeed, we know that a strong spirit of Judaism was infused into early Christianity, and

that it disappeared only as the Holy Spirit recalled the teaching and prophecies of Christ to the minds of the apostles, and enabled them to discover their purport. The converted Jews were treated as a distinct body from the converted Gentiles, in the infancy of the Church; they kept themselves separate from those who had no claim to the privileges of the descendants of Abraham. A miraculous vision was necessary to convince Peter that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."

The spirituality and universality of Christ's kingdom, the leading characteristics of the Christian dispensation, were precisely the points most abhorrent to the prejudices, and darkest to the understandings of those by whom it was originally promulgated. Without a divine guide they would have interpreted the facts of Christianity which had been wrought before their eyes, so as to accord with the erroneous notions which had sunk so deep into their minds as almost to form a part of their existence. The dispensation of the Holy Spirit taught them the true meaning of these facts, and brought them to their remembrance with the additional force derived from the discovery of their purport. "In short, from Adam until Christ, the scheme of man's redemption was prefigured; in Christ's ministry it was accomplished; by the Spirit it was explained." These three dispensations, or rather, this threefold character of a continuous dispensation, deserves to be borne in mind

when we examine the sacred Scriptures for the purpose of comparing one part with another, because it shows that God's revelations were not only promulgated at different times, but that they subserved different purposes; and therefore must be viewed differently, according as they referred to the type, the substance, or the explanation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST. CHRISTIANITY FIRST PREACHED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE JEWS.

ON the day of Pentecost, so called because it falls on the fiftieth day after the passover, counting inclusively, the Jews celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses; on that same day, and just so long after the sacrifice of Him whom the Paschal lamb typified, the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles, and commenced the promulgation of the new law, founded upon the deliverance of universal mankind, from the worse than Egyptian bondage of sin and Satan. The *sign* of this great event was "the baptism with fire," predicted by John the Baptist, and promised by Jesus Christ; flames, shaped like tongues, the ordinary symbols of divine agency, descended on the apostles, infusing into them supernatural gifts, of which they soon afforded convincing proofs to the multitude*.

The Jews, at this time, had spread themselves into almost every part of the known world, so that St. James could safely assert, "Moses of old time hath in

* A slight inaccuracy of translation in the Scriptural account of this miracle deserves notice. In our version the passage is rendered, "there appeared unto them *cloven* tongues, like as of fire," &c.; the Greek word *διαμεριζομεναι*, however, signifies "distributed," not *cloven*; had the latter been the word intended, the Greek would have been *διεσχισμεναι*.

every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day." But these exiles were not content with this observance of the Law in a distant land. As opportunities were afforded, they came to celebrate the great feasts of their nation in the holy city, and hence crowds of strangers were assembled in Jerusalem at every great festival. They were filled with astonishment, when the apostles, whom they knew to be uninstructed men from the rude provinces of Galilee, began to explain to each, in his own language, the wondrous works of God. The miracle soon collected a crowd, and St. Peter became the first preacher of Christianity, by addressing the multitude. The subject of his address was the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, and the consequent duty of acknowledging him to be "both Lord and Christ." It was so effectual that three thousand were converted on that day, and admitted by baptism in the Christian Church.

The new converts did not abandon the Jewish ritual; they "continued daily with one accord in the temple," and the apostles set them the example of observing the stated times of public prayer*. Peter and John, going to offer up their devotions, found, at the gate of the temple, a man who had been lame from his mother's womb, and whose malady, from the place in which he was exposed, was known to the whole city. On him the first apostolic miracle was wrought. Peter, *in the name of Jesus of Nazareth*,

* Acts iii. 1.

commanded him to rise and walk; the lame man was instantly delivered from his malady; he accompanied them to the temple, "walking, and leaping, and praising God."

The difference between this apostolical miracle, and those recorded of Christ, is sufficiently obvious; our Lord always spoke of his own independent authority. "I say unto thee, Arise;" "Lazarus, come forth," &c. Peter avowedly performed this miracle by and through the mediation of Christ. But his form of expression has still deeper import: the Jews had an extraordinary reverence for *the name* of the Deity; even in the present day they rarely pronounce the word Jehovah, when it occurs in the Old Testament, but substitute *Adonai* (lord) in its place. They even believed that there was a secret name of God (*Shem Hamphorasch*), which, if discovered, would confer the power of working a miracle every time it was pronounced. Hence, when an apostle worked a miracle *in the name* of Jesus, he was understood by his Jewish audience to declare that Jesus was God and Lord, for he applied to him the phrase reserved in the most special sense for the Deity, when interfering with the ordinary course of events.

Peter addressed the multitude collected by news of this signal miracle, and gained an addition of five thousand converts to the Church. The Sanhedrim were now alarmed; they arrested the apostles, and had them brought before their council. Here they enquired "by what power or *what name*" they had wrought this miracle? Peter boldly replied, "that

it was by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead," and on whose divinity he strenuously asserted. The rulers were in great perplexity; they could not deny the miracle, and they would not yield to the conviction it ought to have produced. In their uncertainty they contented themselves with commanding the apostles "to speak henceforth to no man *in this name*." It is quite clear that neither the rulers nor the apostles themselves looked upon Christianity at this time as an entirely new dispensation; they viewed it as something additional engrafted on Judaism, perhaps as a species of reformation; the prohibition addressed to Peter and John was designed to check what appeared a novelty, but different measures would have been adopted had the rulers suspected them of meditating a schism.

A second manifestation of the Holy Spirit was vouchsafed to the disciples after they had received the report of what had been done at the council. They now formed themselves into a body, or congregation, held together by the bonds of mutual affection: "The multitude of them were of one heart and soul, neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common*."

Comparing this statement with the other passages that relate to the social economy of the early Christians, it is clear that the apostle does not mean to assert that

* Acts iv. 32.

they established "a perfect community of goods and total abolition of private property;" the remarkable expression, "neither *said* any of them that aught he possessed was *his own*," describes nothing more than an association of mutual confidence and good-will, in which each was willing to assist the other. It appears, however, probable, that those who like the apostles undertook the charge of congregations, and devoted themselves to the propagation of the Gospel, resigned their private possessions, and were supported by the contributions of the faithful. Those, then, who sold their entire possessions and laid the price at the feet of the apostles were candidates for admission into the ministry, and expectants of a share in the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These considerations show us the magnitude of the crime committed by Ananias and Sapphira, who were the subjects of the first miracle of vengeance wrought in the Christian history. They "tempted the Spirit of the Lord;" "they lied not unto man but unto God." They used false pretences to obtain admission into the ministry, with all the spiritual gifts and privileges attached to that office. This was an *aggressive* crime, and it was punished as an act of treason against the Church, whose constitution was assailed, and of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, whose omniscience was practically denied*.

At this time the Sadducean sect had succeeded in

* See this subject fully discussed in HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 209—215.

raising one of their members to the office of high priest, and had thus gained great influence in the council. The doctrine of the resurrection was particularly odious to this party, and they were therefore the more enraged at the continued preaching of the apostles, and at the miracles wrought in the name of Jesus, "who was risen from the dead." They again arrested Peter and several of his associates, but they were miraculously delivered from prison. Nevertheless they obeyed the summons of the officer, and appeared before the council. The high priest reproached them for having disobeyed the prohibition of preaching in the name of Jesus, adding, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." From this expression it appears that the rulers were not quite satisfied with their conduct in persecuting Jesus to death, and entertained some lurking doubts as to the reality of his claims. Hence, when Peter, in reply, strongly insisted on the fact of the resurrection, and the evidence it afforded that Jesus was "a Prince and a Saviour;" they did not deny his assertion, but were "cut to the heart." With short-sighted cunning and cruelty they took counsel to slay "the witnesses" of the fact; but they were prevented by Gamaliel, the head of the Pharisaic party in the Sanhedrim, who advised them to let the apostles alone, for if their work were of men, it would come to nought, but if of God, it could not be overcome by human means. This expression of doubt seems to imply, that though few of the rulers had joined the Christian body, yet that there were some of them who were shaken in their

confidence by the amount of evidence brought before them.

The converts made to Christianity included Jews by descent, and proselytes from the Gentiles or Grecians who had settled in Judæa, and embraced the Jewish religion. As the apostles and early disciples belonged to the former class, "a murmuring of the Grecians arose against the Hebrews, that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." These "widows" were, probably, "deaconesses," or presiding matrons, whose duty it was to instruct the female converts; and there might have been some grounds of complaint, since the Grecians could not be so well known to the apostles and their assistants as those of their own race and class. Seven additional assistants were chosen, probably by the Grecian community, and presented to the apostles. They were called "deacons," or "dispensers," because the immediate object of their appointment was to remedy the defects of "the daily ministration." The office, however, if not the name, must have previously existed, for the seven now elected were all Greeks, and the Hebrews would have had strong grounds of complaint, had not their party, the larger section of Christians, been already supplied with similar officers.

It appears from the conduct of Stephen that preaching and religious instruction, under the superintendence of the apostles, formed part of the duty of a deacon, for we find him engaged in a controversy with the heads of one of the Grecian synagogues, "and they

were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."

The charge brought against St. Stephen by his persecutors shows that at least a section of the Jews had altered their first opinions respecting the doctrine taught by the apostles, and its probable influence on the Jewish constitution. On the two former occasions the accusation was, that they taught "a novelty;" they preached and performed miracles *in the name* of Jesus; but no one insinuated that this novelty was inconsistent with the Mosaic law.

In the case of Stephen, the persecutors, for the first time, set forth that this novelty was subversive of the established order of things: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words *against* this holy place and the Law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall *destroy* this place, and shall *change* the customs which Moses delivered us."

The difference between the line of defence taken by Stephen and that which Peter had previously adopted, is not less strongly marked than the difference between the accusations. Peter confines himself exclusively to asserting the divine mission of Christ; Stephen enters into the history of the ancient covenant between God and his people, showing that the privileges it granted were forfeited by the neglect of the Jews to fulfil the conditions: "Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." His auditors seem to have understood that he claimed through Jesus Christ the same privileges for the Grecian proselytes which they believed to be exclusively reserved

for the descendants of Abraham. This extension of Christianity, which the apostles had sanctioned by ordaining seven Grecian deacons, was so offensive to the proud bigots of the council, that they "gnashed upon him with their teeth;" and when he, a foreign proselyte, declared that a vision of celestial glory was opened before his eyes, and withheld from them, the exclusive inheritors of all such revelations, they rushed upon him tumultuously, "cast him out of the city, and stoned him."

The first departure from the strict exclusiveness of Judaism thus became the signal for the first persecution, and the first martyrdom. It was an ebullition of popular fury and bigotry, unauthorized by the civil power, but for that very reason the more to be dreaded by its objects. The disciples "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles." Philip, one of the deacons, preached the Gospel with great success in Samaria; and even the sorcerer Simon, who had for a long time imposed himself upon his countrymen as "some great one," perhaps as the Messiah, became, at least for a season, a believer, and was admitted by baptism into the Church.

Two apostles were sent to confirm this infant church by conferring upon it some of those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, which should be an evidence, while their faith was yet young and weak, that the unseen Spirit had taken up his abode within them. The conferring of these extraordinary gifts was the peculiar privilege of the apostles, and

hence we find that whenever a church was established by the agency of others, an apostle was sent to give its members this sign of assurance*. While they were thus employed, Philip was sent by the Spirit to convert the minister of the Ethiopian queen, Candace, and this admission of a foreign proselyte to the privileges of Christianity was a further confirmation of its blessings being extended beyond the strict precincts of Judaism.

The conversion of Saul, who had taken a leading part in the persecution of Stephen, was one of the consequences of that saint's martyrdom. Saul, or, he was subsequently called, Paul, obtained a commission from the high priest, to search out those who believed on Christ in Damascus, and send them to Jerusalem for examination before the council. This was doubtless an unusual stretch of authority, on which the high priest would not have ventured but for the unsettled state of Judæa, and the contempt with which the Romans viewed any disputes that were confined to the Jews themselves. A miraculous light from heaven struck Paul to the earth, a voice from heaven upbraided him with persecution, and he was led blind to Damascus, to await further communications from the Holy Spirit. Ananias, a disciple who resided at Damascus, was sent to restore his sight and to receive him as a convert into the Christian Church. His baptism was marked by an effusion of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, but he

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 227—229, and 245—250.

did not become an apostle until a second revelation was vouchsafed to him at Jerusalem, in the person of Jesus Christ*.

After his conversion Paul preached the Gospel boldly at Damascus, and in Arabia; during a second visit to Damascus, his zeal gave such offence to the Jews that his life was in danger, and he was only saved by being let down from the wall in a basket. When he came to Jerusalem the disciples were at first unwilling to receive him, but Barnabas, who appears to have been some time previously received as a colleague by the apostles, brought Paul to them, and convinced them of his sincerity. From the time of Paul's conversion the fury of the first persecution appears to have greatly abated, and soon after it ceased altogether. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

During the period we have examined, there was no formal separation of Christianity from Judaism, and the churches, established by the apostles, differed little, if at all, from the Jewish synagogues. Each had an elder teacher, with one or more younger assistants, who acted as deacons; the female converts were instructed by the deaconesses, who were generally devout widows or matrons. A general superintendence over all was exercised by the apostles, and they

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 231-2.

seem to have had, exclusively, the right of recognising a church, which had been founded by others of the disciples. The special gift of "the discerning of spirits," was applicable to this purpose, for it might happen that a church or congregation might be brought together from unworthy motives, and without that full belief in what Christ had revealed, which was necessary to the character of true Christians.

As the apostles still considered themselves Jews, so neither did the Jews, notwithstanding the burst of bigotry which led to the martyrdom of Stephen, regard the Christians as enemies of the Mosaic law; they persecuted them as sectaries, but not as infidels; they accused Stephen of a design *to change* but not *abolish* the customs which Moses delivered. Indeed, as we have already said, the chief source of their rancour against that martyr appears to have been his assertion of an equality between Jews and proselytes. Any further enlargement of Christianity does not appear to have been contemplated, and a special revelation was necessary to induce Peter to extend his ministry even to "a devout Gentile, and one that feared God, with all his house; who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God daily."

It is not easy to trace the institutions and customs of the apostolic churches, during this period. It appears that both the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's day were observed weekly; that public prayers were offered up whenever the Christians assembled; that the eucharist was regularly administered, and was usually connected with a feast of charity; that impo-

sition of hands was used in bestowing any blessing, and in appointment to the ministry, and that Christians, when they met, saluted each other with "the kiss of peace." These, however, were all *additions* to the Mosaic rites, for the Jewish converts believed themselves still bound to observe the Law, even in its most minute particulars.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN JEWISH AND GENTILE CONVERTS.

PETER was the first apostle selected by the Holy Spirit to make known the way of salvation to those beyond the pale of the Jewish church. We have already seen that he was deeply imbued with the prejudices of his age and nation; he clung firmly to the belief in a temporal Messiah, even attempting to deliver Christ by force when he was arrested; in his address to the multitude after the descent of the Holy Ghost, he limited his declaration of the blessings which Christ had purchased by his death, to the "House of Israel*." The utmost extent he gives to these benefits, includes only the dispersed children of the captivity: "The promise is unto you and to your children, and to *them that are afar off*;" that is, the scattered tribes of Israel. He was, therefore, the person most likely to persuade his brethren that the Gospel was really extended to the Gentiles, for they must have known that he was the most likely to yield to such a truth with difficulty and reluctance.

Cornelius, a devout Gentile, holding the rank of centurion in the Italian legion, was warned by a heavenly vision to send for Peter to Joppa, that he might be instructed in the truth. As the messengers

* Acts ii. 36.

drew nigh, a symbolic revelation was granted to prepare Peter for their reception. Being hungry, he fell into a trance, and saw "a certain vessel descending to him as it had been a great sheet, knit at the four corners, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise Peter; kill and eat*."

The minute and precise injunctions of the Law respecting the distinction between animals which might be lawfully used for food and those which were prohibited, had been greatly extended by tradition, so that a Jew could scarcely eat at the same table with a Gentile, and escape the risk of pollution. Onerous as such a prohibition must have been, it was still gratifying to the national pride, as being a mark of an exclusive and chosen people; hence Peter's prompt reply, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." The heavenly voice reproved this display of Jewish pride: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The impressive lesson was thrice repeated; but Peter understood not its meaning until the Spirit commanded him to go down to the messengers who sought him, and to accompany them "nothing doubting."

A more remarkable sign was granted in confirmation of the lesson which this vision conveyed; while Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Ghost "fell on all them which heard the

* Acts x. 10—14.

word," and they manifested its influence by "speaking with tongues, and magnifying God." This is the only instance of the Holy Ghost descending on those who were not yet baptized; and consequently, the miracle afforded the strongest proof of the blessings of redemption being extended to the Gentiles. Perhaps no lesser miracle could have overcome the Jewish prejudices of the apostles, for after Peter had admitted Cornelius and his converted friends by baptism into the church, he was called to account for his conduct by some of his brethren in Jerusalem, and their prejudices were not removed until he declared, "As I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning." They then glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*."

The intelligence of so remarkable an event was soon spread through the general body of believers; some Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had been converted by those disciples who fled from Jerusalem when Stephen was martyred, began to preach to the Gentiles of Antioch, "and the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." So numerous were they, that they received a distinctive name, "The disciples were called *Christians* first in Antioch," for previously they had been regarded, and indeed looked upon themselves as a section of the Jewish people, though scarcely, perhaps, a distinct sect.

* Acts xi. 13.

Barnabas was sent by the apostles to establish and confirm the church at Antioch, as Peter and John had formerly been to Samaria. After he had exhorted the new converts to perseverance, he chose Paul as his assistant, and remained with him a year at Antioch, extending and confirming the multitude of believers. It is interesting to find this first Gentile church subscribing to relieve their elder brethren, the church of Jerusalem, when they heard from the prophet Agabus of the famine that was about to come upon the land.

From the moment the disciples were called "Christians," and began to receive Gentile converts into the church, the Jews no longer tolerated them, but sought in every way to diminish their number and their influence. Herod, who had long been odious to the people, strove to conciliate their favour by putting to death St. James, the brother of John, and finding that this "pleased the Jews," he threw Peter into prison. An angel delivered Peter from his danger; but he deemed it prudent to leave Jerusalem, and the city appears to have been for a season abandoned by the apostles. It was probably during their absence that Paul and Barnabas brought to Jerusalem the contributions sent from Antioch, for we read that they were paid to the presbyters or elders, not to the apostles.

When Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, the Holy Spirit revealed to the Church that they were to be "separated" for a special mission, the extension of the Gospel among the Gentiles. They first visited Cyprus, and "preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." This was indeed their general

course, not merely because they believed the Jews to be the primary objects of attention, but because they were in some degree prepared to hear the doctrines of Christianity by their acquaintance with the Law and the Prophets. The establishment of Jewish synagogues in almost every great city of the Roman empire, greatly facilitated the promulgation of Christianity, and may indeed be regarded as a providential means of facilitating its diffusion. It appears that the Jews were more respected in the eastern part of the empire than they were in Rome, that they had made many Greek proselytes, and that several of the Gentiles, without becoming proselytes, were in the habit of attending the synagogues. This may have arisen in some degree from the Septuagint version of the Scriptures being used in some of the Jewish places of worship, and perhaps being also known to the reading portion of the Greeks. That this version was very generally circulated, appears to be proved by its being so frequently quoted in the New Testament.

The miraculous blindness inflicted on Elymas the sorcerer led to the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor at Paphos. This sorcerer was a Jew who made false pretensions to the gift of prophecy, and by his subtilty had acquired considerable influence in Cyprus. There were many such impostors among the Jews, and they were among the most virulent opponents of the apostles. This miraculous event deserves to be further noticed from its close analogy to the circumstances attending the conversion of St. Paul himself. The apostle was made the agent of giving to

the sorcerer the same sign and check,—a miraculous blindness,—which had stopped his own career as a blasphemer and a persecutor. The sacred writer has not recorded the result, but we may well believe that physical blindness was inflicted upon Elymas as it had previously been upon St. Paul, as a type of the spiritual blindness by which he was influenced, and thus to inspire him with the desire of being led “out of darkness into marvellous light.”

From Cyprus, the apostolic missionaries proceeded to the continent and travelled through the provinces of Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia; preaching first in the synagogues, and only addressing the Gentiles when the Jews refused to hear them. They found the Jews generally prepossessed against them; even miracles could not remove their prejudices against the doctrine of a suffering Messiah; the Gentiles, on the other hand, when not stimulated by the Jews, heard the apostles willingly. When they saw their miracles at Lystra they were disposed to offer them divine honours, and it was with difficulty that Paul restrained them from offering sacrifices to him. In the course of this journey Barnabas and Paul founded several churches, over which they ordained presbyters. It is very probable that the greater part of the converts made in this journey belonged to the class of “devout Gentiles;” that is, persons who had to a certain extent become proselytes to Judaism, and attended public worship in the synagogues; still “the door of faith had been opened” to the Gentiles generally. The work of conversion was begun.

A portion of the converted Jews at Jerusalem having visited the church of Antioch, endeavoured to compel the Gentile converts to observe the laws of Moses. Such a proposal would scarcely have been made had there been a large number of converts made directly from idolatry; but the Christians of Antioch were, for the most part, if not altogether, "devout Gentiles," or "proselytes of the gate." In the preceding chapter we have seen that the burst of popular indignation against St. Stephen arose chiefly from his having claimed equal privileges for Jews and proselytes; but it was still undetermined on what condition these privileges should be conceded. The church of Antioch resolved to take the opinion of the church of Jerusalem on the subject; they deputed Paul and Barnabas to inquire whether the Judaizing teachers had been commissioned to preach the doctrine of the necessity of circumcision, and also to ascertain what rule was established in Jerusalem on the subject. In the church of Antioch, the Gentile converts were probably a majority; in Jerusalem, the converted Jews had a decided preponderance; the opinion of the church of Jerusalem was, therefore, more likely to influence the Judaizing teachers than that of Antioch; moreover, the question must already have engaged the attention of the apostles, for though the Gentile converts at Jerusalem were the minority, they were still sufficiently numerous to require the services of seven deacons.

These considerations show that no appeal was made to the church of Jerusalem as possessing central or

metropolitan authority; and the result of the deliberations shows that the apostles and elders declared what their existing rule was, and did not as a council or synod issue any authoritative decree. This view of the transaction is at once established by a reference to the speech with which St. Peter opened the deliberations. He reminded his hearers that he had been sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, that God had become witness to his mission, "giving them the Holy Ghost," as he had to the apostles, putting no difference between the two classes of converts, and "purifying their hearts by faith." He then declares that the Judaizing project was *a novelty*, asking its proposers, "Why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

St. James similarly objects to the proposition as a new burden: "My sentence is, that we trouble not (or rather, add no cause of confusion to) them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God." He therefore proposes that they should only continue to observe the rules to which they had been previously accustomed as proselytes: "To abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." The decree, in fact, refers to the existing state of paganism in Asia: the heathen deities were worshipped by sacrifices of which it was an act of homage to partake; the grossest sensual indulgence formed a part of the ritual in many temples, and various degrading superstitions were connected with the use of blood. Hence we see that this decree, or rather this

recommendation, was not designed, nor did it purport to be, of perpetual obligation. It was required at a particular juncture, produced by special circumstances, and it lost its efficacy when these circumstances ceased to exist.

Soon after their return to Antioch Paul and Barnabas agreed to make a second tour to the churches they had founded, but, owing to some difference of opinion, they took different routes, Barnabas being accompanied by Mark, as his deacon, or assistant, and Paul by Silas. At Lystra, Timothy, the son of a Jewess, by a Greek father, was added to Paul's company, and at Troas he appears to have been joined by Luke.

While at Troas a divine vision invited Paul to go and preach the Gospel in Macedonia. Paul immediately recognised the summons of the Holy Spirit, and passed over into Europe.

There was no synagogue at Philippi, though some Jews or proselytes appear to have resided in the city, for we are told that prayers were used to be made "by a river side" on the Sabbath-day. Here Paul first exercised the authority over evil spirits, which Christ had promised to his apostles. "A damsel, possessed with a spirit of divination," followed Paul and his companions, exclaiming, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Having already touched upon the question of the power of evil spirits (see page 76), it is only necessary to say, that, in this instance, the demoniacal possession must have been real, for the spirit uttered a truth which the damsel would not

have discovered, and when it was cast out, the owners of the girl "saw that the hope of their gains was gone." They accused Paul and Silas to the magistrates, who punished them without a trial, and committed them to prison. At midnight they were miraculously delivered, but made no attempt to escape; the keeper of the prison was so struck with their conduct, that he and his whole family were converted to the Lord.

In the morning the magistrates would have liberated the prisoners, but Paul insisted on the wrong that had been inflicted on him, as he was by birth entitled to the privileges of a Roman citizen. The magistrates were greatly alarmed at this intelligence, for a violation of the freedom of a citizen was a serious offence; they came in person to the prison, and entreated Paul to depart from their city.

After having preached in the synagogues of Thessalonica and Beræa, Paul came to Athens, where the report of the doctrine he preached in the synagogues appears to have excited great curiosity among the philosophers and students assembled in that city. Athens was, at this period, the university of the ancient world; men of learning and leisure flocked thither from every part of the empire, and the young nobility of Greece and Rome generally completed their education in that city. In consequence of the multitude of strangers Athens presented a medley of nearly all the forms of ancient paganism; "*the city

* Acts xvii. 16, marginal version.

was full of idols." An altar was erected to "the Unknown God." Dr. Hinds* conjectures that this may have been dedicated to the new God preached by the Christians, but, perhaps, it might have been consecrated to the "invisible God" of the Jews, for the absence of images in the synagogues led the heathen to form very strange conjectures respecting the real object of Jewish worship. When Paul was brought to give an account of his new doctrines, he declared that he preached "the Unknown God," whom they ignorantly worshipped; and then proceeded to preach Christ to the multitude. But the doctrine of the resurrection was "to the Greeks foolishness;" when they heard it some mocked, and others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter."

From Athens Paul proceeded to Corinth, where he continued a year and six months. In this city he first heard of the foundation of a church at Rome, from Aquila and Priscilla, who had come to Corinth when the Jews were banished from Rome, by the Emperor Claudius. The Christian church at Corinth was one of the most flourishing that had yet been founded, and the apostle appears to have regarded it with peculiar interest. His Epistles to the Corinthians contain more information respecting the ecclesiastical discipline of the early churches than any other documents of the apostolic age, and enter into minute particulars, which show how anxious was the vigilance with which this church was superintended.

* *Christianity*, i., 310.

The next place at which Paul made a long delay was Ephesus, where several events occurred that deserve our notice. Here St. Paul found certain disciples, who had not "so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost." It is probable that these persons, and Apollos, who was similarly circumstanced, had left Judæa before Christ had made his mission completely manifest. Their ignorance of an event so important to all believers as the descent of the Holy Spirit, arose from the slowness with which intelligence of any kind was communicated from one place to another in these days, and the readiness with which they received Christian baptism shows that they regarded John as the fore-runner of him who was "to baptize with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." The miracles which Paul wrought, and, particularly, his success in expelling demons from the possessed, excited several of the Jews to attempt the same wonders *in the name* of Jesus. They were severely punished by the demon, and this produced so much alarm, that those who practised the delusions of occult arts collected their books and burned them publicly.

The Gospel began now to spread so rapidly among the idolatrous Gentiles, that the artificers employed in making shrines for the heathen temples became alarmed, and the silversmith, Demetrius, excited a great tumult at Ephesus, by declaring that the worship of Diana, the tutelar deity of the city, was in danger of being wholly neglected. This incident is chiefly remarkable for the proof it affords of the great extension of Christianity by Paul's exertions, and his

success with a class, which most, if not all the other apostles, looked upon as placed beyond the sphere of their labours.

After the Ephesian tumult Paul made a circuit through the churches of Asia Minor and Greece, preparatory to his journey to Jerusalem, to be present at the feast of Pentecost. At Miletus he sent for the elders of the Ephesian church, of whom he took a most affectionate farewell, declaring that "they should see his face no more." It is probable that the apostle anticipated the dangers to which he would be exposed from the malice of the Jews, but he was not discouraged; even when the prophet Agabus, while he was on the road, predicted that he should be bound by his countrymen and delivered to the Gentiles, he declared, "I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus."

To the obnoxious doctrine of a spiritual Messiah, Paul had now added the still more unpopular announcements that the blessings of revelation were offered to all the nations of the earth, and that the observance of the Mosaic ritual was not essential to salvation. Odious as these tenets were to the Jews at all times, they were now rendered still more revolting by the increasing pressure of the Roman yoke. The Jews who had quitted their country, and settled in various parts of the empire, continually mortified by witnessing idolatrous processions and festivals, had rendered themselves unpopular by their refusal to share in such displays of public joy. We

learn from Horace that even men of rank made it a kind of fashionable amusement to insult their simple forms of worship, and mock their observance of the Sabbath. They were sometimes expelled from a city, as from Rome by Claudius Cæsar, and they were always regarded with mingled feelings of dislike and contempt. Under such treatment they were only supported by their hope of a temporal deliverer, who would place their nation supreme in the earth, and enable them to exact heavy vengeance for the wrongs they had endured. The preaching of St. Paul was therefore directed against their dearest hopes; and when they communicated the wrongs they had endured to their countrymen at home, they naturally added the aggravation to their sufferings inflicted by one who preached against their looking for, much less expecting redress.

It appears that these feelings were shared by many, even of the Christians at Jerusalem. When Paul related the wondrous events of his three apostolic journeys to the apostles and the presbyters of the churches of Jerusalem, they "glorified God," but at the same time they warned Paul that the thousands of Jews which believed "were zealous for the Law." At their recommendation he joined four Jewish Christians in performing the ceremony of purification in the temple. But his conformity to this Mosaic ceremony produced the very evil it was designed to avert. Trophimus, a Gentile convert, had been seen walking with him in the city, and it was erroneously supposed that he had brought the stranger into the temple.

This afforded the Jews of Asia a pretext for exciting the multitude: they cried out, "Men of Israel, help: this is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and this place, and further, brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." It is remarkable that in this charge they made no mention of his preaching the Lord Jesus, a circumstance which seems to prove that they appealed as much to the prejudices of the Jewish Christians as to those of the Jews.

Paul would have been torn to pieces had not Lysias, the commander of the Roman guard, interfered. From him Paul obtained permission to address the multitude, and the reception he met shows either that a large part of his audience were Christians, or that the prejudices against Jesus of Nazareth had greatly abated in Jerusalem. They heard with patience his account of the miraculous vision on the road to Damascus, his declaration that Jesus was the Just One, and his repentance for his share in the death of the martyr Stephen*; but when he declared that he was commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, they burst out into a unanimous roar of reprobation, crying, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it not fit that he should live."

When he was brought the next morning before the council, Paul brought the Pharisaic part of the assembly over to his side, by declaring that he was

* Acts xxii. 1—20.

called in question for "the hope and resurrection of the dead." The expressions used by the scribes of this party show that they did not wholly reject belief in Jesus, or, at least, that they admitted room for doubt respecting his mission: "If a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him (Paul), let us not fight against God." This reference to the apostle's account of his miraculous vision, in which he distinctly stated that it was Jesus who spoke, is very nearly an admission on the part of the Pharisees of the truth of his resurrection.

The captain of the temple sent Paul under an escort to Cæsarea, where the Roman governor resided, and here he was brought to trial, but without any decisive result. At length he appealed to Cæsar, obedient to the heavenly vision which warned him that he should testify to the truth in Rome. After a tedious and dangerous voyage he reached Italy, and was permitted to reside at Rome "in his own hired house." The favour thus shown him was probably owing not merely to the letter which the governor sent to the emperor, though that must have shown the charges against him to be trifling, but also to the report made by the centurion and the soldiers of his conduct on the voyage. Their safety was owing to his interference when the sailors were about to desert the ship; in their presence he had shaken off the viper which seized upon his arm, without receiving any injury from the noxious reptile; and they were aware of the miraculous cures he had effected in the island of Melita. These circumstances were of great

advantage to the apostle; they directed public attention towards him, and we find from the Epistles that he reckoned among his converts some members "of Cæsar's household."

The preaching of the Gospel at Rome completed the full development of the Christian dispensation. At first confined to the Jews, it had been timorously extended to the "devout Gentiles," and finally, amid much opposition, to the whole human race. Rome was the capital and representative of the heathen world, and the public preaching of the Gospel within its walls accomplished that sign which Christ had foretold should precede the destruction of Jerusalem: "This Gospel must first be preached in all the world."

CHAPTER IX.

NOTICES OF THE LIVES AND LABOURS OF THE
APOSTLES. DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

HITHERTO we have traced the history of Christianity as it has been recorded by the pen of inspiration, but we must now part from this safe guide, and collect some particulars of the apostles' labours from incidental notices in the Epistles, and from the more uncertain authority of ancient traditions.

From Rome Paul addressed Epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians, the Ephesians, and also to Philemon. To these by general, but not universal consent, we may add the Epistle to the Hebrews, or Jewish Christians. Paul, as we have seen, was not popular with this class of converts, and had he been recognised at the first as its author, most probably his admirable reasoning on the typical character of the Mosaic dispensation would have been rejected without examination. "The Epistle to the Hebrews," says the late Bishop of Meath, "was doubtless written to the converts of that nation who were settled in Rome, and was sent most probably in the name of St. Luke. Hence the writer in his concluding words mentions 'those from Italy' as particularly joining in the apostle's prayers for the welfare of those to whom the epistle is addressed." The mention of Timothy's imprisonment confirms this view of the origin of the epistle, for the ecclesiastical historians

relate that Timothy was thrown into prison in Asia before he was sent to Rome by St. Paul. When liberated from confinement, Paul preached the Gospel in Italy, and probably in Spain; thence he returned homewards through Crete, and after a short delay at Jerusalem, made Antioch his residence. Tradition states that he subsequently made a tour through the churches he had founded, and then went a second time to Rome, where he suffered martyrdom in the Neronian persecution.

Little can be gleaned from the Scriptures respecting the labours of St. Peter after the conversion of Cornelius. He appears to have regarded the "devout Gentiles" as the peculiar objects of his care, and to this class of converts his General Epistle is addressed*. It is addressed (*παρεπιδημοις διασπορας*) "to the sojourners, (that is, the Gentiles) of the dispersion." The Jews regarded their Gentile proselytes as sojourners or foreigners in the faith of Abraham, and St. Peter was very rigid in his adherence to Jewish phraseology. We know casually that he was anxious to retain a greater share of Judaism in Christianity than Paul approved, and that the latter triumphed in the controversy. He is said to have been active in exposing the impostures of Simon Magus, the influence of which extended from Samaria even to Rome. On the other hand, many have doubted whether he ever visited Rome. On the whole, it seems most probable that he accompanied Paul in

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii, 4.

his last visit to that city, and became like him a victim to the cruelty of Nero.

A reference to the authentic facts recorded in the New Testament will at once show why it was likely that Paul should desire to have Peter as his companion in a second visit to Rome. Paul, as we have seen, was as much disliked by the Judaizing Christians, or, at least, by those who wavered between Judaism and Christianity, as he was by the Jews themselves. When he was arrested at Jerusalem, we find, on the one hand, that the persecution did not extend to any others of the Christian body; and on the other hand, there is no record of any sympathy for his sufferings being shewn by the Christians at Jerusalem. Among the five friends named as forming Paul's company in Rome, Mark, the nephew of his old associate Barnabas, is the only one of pure Jewish descent, and he appears to have been only a visitor, for the Colossians are warned to make preparation for his reception, should he persevere in his design of going to their church*. From the Epistle to the Romans it appears that the Jewish Christians formed a large portion, probably the majority, of the church founded at Rome, and that they were anxious to impose the ceremonials of the Law on their converts. It is therefore exceedingly probable that Paul would seek the aid of Peter to deal with the Jews and proselytes, as he was himself unpopular amongst them, especially as any uproar at Rome, similar to

* Colossians iv. 10.

that which occurred at Jerusalem, would have seriously impeded the propagation of the Gospel*.

Nero, as is well known, accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome, a crime, of which he was more than suspected himself. It is not difficult to assign plausible, if not probable reasons for the choice made by the tyrant, of the Christians as the class most likely to bear the odious imputation which he had cast upon them. They must obviously have been already objects of popular suspicion, or the mass of the people would not so readily have joined in the outcry and persecution raised against them. In the first place, then, we may remark that the Christians were at the beginning regarded by the Heathens as a sect of the Jews, and consequently, they shared in the odium and suspicion with which that race was viewed throughout the empire. Gallio refused to investigate the charge brought against Paul by the Jews in Corinth, because it was "a question of words and names, and of their law." We have seen that the Jews looked to the coming of the Messiah for redress of the wrongs they endured, and revenge for the injuries they had suffered. It is probable that many of them in Rome, as the Arabian Jews in the time of Mohammed at Yatreb†, gave vent to these hopes, when receiving some grievous affliction from their persecutors, and thus led the latter to associate the name of Messiah, or Christ, with ideas of revolt and

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii., 7.

† See TAYLOR'S *History of Mohammedanism*, p. 94.

insurrection. The unbelieving Jews could easily take advantage of the popular error, and point to their converted brethren as disciples of the menaced Christ, and pledged followers of the threatened deliverer.

If the Christian mysteries had already received the name of *sacraments*, this circumstance would have given new strength to the calumny. *Sacrament* among the Romans was the technical phrase for the military oath, and hence the Christians would be regarded as the *sworn* soldiers of the avenger, with whom they had been menaced by the Jews. Circumstances far less suspicious, have in later times laid the foundation of a popular panic, a popular cry, and a popular persecution; and the persecution has been always the more sanguinary in proportion as the panic has been the more unfounded, and the cry the more senseless. The innocence of the Christians, at such a crisis, would afford them no protection; any attempt to make it manifest would only have increased the rage of the persecutors, for nothing so maddens a populace in a season of epidemic terror as an attempt to show that they have been frightened without reason. In the French Revolution, it was not less dangerous to show no fear of the aristocracy, than actually to belong to the detested body.

From Pliny's letter to Trajan, we are led to suspect that the name of sacrament was first given to the Christian mysteries by their heathen adversaries, who wished to represent these holy solemnities, as secret oaths by which the partakers were bound to perpetrate and conceal deeds of darkness. "The Christians

declared," says Pliny, "that this was the amount of their guilt or their error; that on a stated day they used to meet before daylight, and address to Christ as God, a form of words broken into alternate portions; *that their sacrament was nothing to bind them to any deed of wickedness*, but to preserve them from committing theft, robbery, falsehood, dishonest practices; that when it was all over, they used to disperse, and again meet at a meal, in which there was nothing remarkable or blame-worthy." Pliny was clearly misled by the calumniators of the Christians into the belief that the baptismal vow was a species of secret and unlawful *sacrament* or oath. The way in which he uses the word, implies that the suspicions which he and the Emperor entertained of the Christians, were derived from the presumed nature of the supposed oath. The meal to which he refers was, of course, the Feast of Love, respecting which many gross falsehoods were circulated by Pagan calumniators.

Nero found the Roman populace ready to fall upon the Christians, and only waiting for such a signal as he gave when he accused them of burning the city. To this popular rancour must be ascribed the exhibition of the tortures of the martyrs as spectacles of public amusement. They were smeared with pitch to represent torches, and their sufferings contributed to illuminate the night*. In this persecution St. Paul was beheaded, being allowed this easy death, probably, on account of his citizenship, while St. Peter, who

* TACIT. *Ann.*, xv., 44.

had no such protection, was crucified with his head downwards, having first seen his wife martyred before his eyes.

We have seen that there was probably some abatement of the Jewish rancour towards the Christians at the time when St. Paul was arrested at Jerusalem and sent to Rome; and that Paul himself escaped immediate condemnation by appealing to the prejudices of the Pharisaic sect. Many circumstances combined to destroy this temporary tranquillity; every Jew who came to the annual festivals from Asia Minor and Greece, brought fresh proofs of Christianity being preached to the Gentiles, and many of them, doubtless, could quote from hearsay, passages in St. Paul's epistles to the Churches, declaring the inefficacy of the works of the Law. Dark clouds were beginning to gather round the horizon of Judæa, giving solemn warning of the approaching tempest that was to desolate the land; at such a time, our Lord's predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem must have been forcibly recalled to the minds of the disciples, and must have led them to make themselves more and more distinct from a people fore-doomed to destruction.

These causes of alienation were brought to a crisis, when Ananias, a Sadducee, obtained the high-priesthood*, at a time when the governorship of the province was vacant. He embraced this opportunity to seize upon St. James, called the Less, to distinguish

* JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities*, book xx., ch. 9.

him from one of the sons of Zebedee, and the Just, on account of his high character with all classes of the community. At the feast of the Passover, St. James was placed upon a conspicuous part of the temple, and there commanded to make a public disavowal of Jesus as the Messiah, and to deny the doctrine of his resurrection, which was so peculiarly obnoxious to the Sadducees. The apostle, instead of complying, boldly declared that the abode of Jesus was "on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and that he was coming hereafter in the clouds of heaven." This allusion to Daniel's prophecy, which we have seen to have been the prediction respecting the Messiah most common and popular amongst the Jews, filled the Sadducees and the multitude with rage; they rushed upon him, hurled him down from the place on which he stood, and while he was praying for his persecutors, a blow from a club put an end to his sufferings.

James is called by most ecclesiastical writers, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and the great respect in which he was held by the Jews, may have induced the apostles to give him the especial charge of the Church in that city. His epistle, the only one of his writings which has been preserved, is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad;" it came, therefore, with peculiar propriety from the person who presided over the Church in the sanctuary and metropolis of their nation. It seems probable that the Pharisees took no active part in the murder of St. James; indeed, many of the Jews regarded the crime with

horror, for Josephus declares, that the destruction of Jerusalem was long afterwards regarded as a merited punishment for this atrocity.

Passing over the uncertain traditions respecting the rest of the apostles, we come to St. John, the last survivor of that body. From his Epistles, but more particularly from the book of Revelations, we find that he laboured chiefly in Asia Minor, and exercised apostolic control over the celebrated seven churches. During the persecution under Domitian he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where probably he wrote his Epistles and the book of Revelations. After the death of Domitian, he fixed his residence at Ephesus, and died there, at the advanced age of ninety-six.

Before St. John closed his mortal career, the canon of the New Testament had been completed, and the Church inherited in a permanent form the instructions which the apostles, during their lifetime, had communicated by word of mouth. It is not necessary to enter into the history of the several Gospels and Epistles, to determine the precise date in which they were written, or the form in which they were communicated to the early Christians; our only inquiry regards the purpose they were designed to serve. We find the New Testament to be both a record of the facts which form the subject of Christianity, and furthermore an interpretation of the scheme of redemption based upon these facts. Hence we find the early churches instantly entering upon their functions as guardians of the sacred records, collecting them into one deposit, and perhaps procuring the translation of a portion of them from the

Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek, the prevalent language of the Eastern churches.

After the death of St. John, the last channel by which miraculous gifts was conveyed to the Christian body was removed. The apostles conferred the mysterious powers of the Holy Spirit to those on whom they laid their hands; but they did not extend to them the gift of similarly communicating these powers to others. Direct miracles may be said to have ceased, therefore, when the generation succeeding the apostles had departed, and the Christian churches were then left to be guided by the Scriptures or written revelations, without receiving any further revelation by miraculous means.

From the history of the period over which we have gone, it appears that the constitution of the separate Christian churches was not uniform and systematic, and that these different churches did not form one organized community. For instance, the Jewish Christians were a distinct body from the "devout Gentiles," and these, again, held themselves separate from the converted idolaters. As one or other of these three bodies preponderated in a particular church, so must its system of discipline and observances have varied. The only mode in which discipline could be enforced at this time was by censure, or by expulsion. A church, like every other society, has the right of excluding from its privileges those who violate the laws devised for its safety. Expulsion or excommunication, so far as the church was concerned, was merely an exclusion of the offender from

the society of the faithful, and from a participation in the sacraments, &c., which were the visible signs of its being a community. The church punished *a scandal*, but to God belonged the cognizance of the sin, and this distinction is clearly intimated in the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira: "Thou hast lied," says the apostle, "not unto man, but unto God." It is not at all surprising that we should have a very imperfect account of the discipline of the early churches; while the Christians were a small and persecuted community there could have been little occasion for the exercise of vigilant watchfulness on the part of the ruling body. Dissatisfied parties were more likely to leave them than to disturb their assemblies; the occasions for exercising the inherent power of exclusion must have been so few, that the rule of conduct in each instance would probably be suggested by the circumstances of the occasion.

The question of the form of government established in the first churches may be solved with equal simplicity. It was suited to the special circumstances of each church, and it varied as these circumstances altered. While Christianity was confined to Judæa, we read only of apostles, presbyters, and deacons. Afterwards we find apostolic missionaries, sent to "confirm" churches established in distant places, by conferring on them the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and still later, we find apostles "separated," or "set apart," like Paul and Barnabas, to found new churches. Apostolic superintendence sufficed in the earlier stages; but as churches multiplied, and as the apostles

were removed, additional superintendence became necessary.

Episcopacy thus grew up from the wants of the churches, and accommodated itself to the circumstances from which it originated. It was *sanctioned* by the apostles, and it therefore may claim at least the merit of inspired approbation; it has been perpetuated since the apostolic age, and may therefore appeal to the testimony of Christian history. But, assuredly, neither episcopacy nor any other form of church government was so established by the apostles, as to deprive all future ages of a right to change and modify it. The very universality of Christianity, as distinguished from the exclusiveness of Judaism, rendered it necessary that many of its usages in discipline and government should be left undefined, and capable of being modified as the changes of realm or of time might require.

The destruction of Jerusalem did effect a great revolution in Christian discipline; previous to that time the great majority of the converted Jews refused to "eat with the Gentiles," and, consequently, the two classes of converts formed separate communities. It is an error, often exposed, and as often repeated, to look upon the early Christian church as *one society*; it consisted of several societies, formed on common principles, and enjoying common privileges; but it was not a uniform, organic body, for we have shown that important differences existed between its several divisions.

Originally there was one bishop to every church, and his title, which literally signifies "an overseer," or

“an inspector,” indicated that his office was to superintend and direct the labours of the presbyters and deacons. But as the ministers of religion in the early centuries were to a great extent missionaries, it frequently happened that small congregations of Christians were formed in the towns or villages adjacent to great cities, which were not sufficiently large to require a full clerical establishment, and which were, therefore, affiliated to the principal church or congregation over which the bishop presided. In this way episcopal authority, originally confined to one congregation, was extended to several, and the beneficial results of such an arrangement having been proved by experience, it was perpetuated in most of the churches.

Our Lord’s prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem had supplied his disciples with a knowledge of the signs that would herald the event, and of the means by which they might escape from the coming calamity. There were “wars and rumours of wars;” “false Christs and false prophets” appeared, who deluded multitudes; “nation rose against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;” there were “famines and troubles,” and yet these were only “the beginnings of sorrows.”

The tyranny of Florus at length drove the Jews into open revolt; they slaughtered the Romans without mercy wherever they fell into their power, and openly proclaimed their resolution never again to submit to a foreign yoke. Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, advanced with a powerful army to besiege Jerusalem. The ensigns of the Roman soldiers, with

their idolatrous ensigns, "the abomination of desolation," were displayed before the walls, and "Jerusalem was compassed about with armies." This was the last sign for which the Christians were to wait, and Providence opened to them the means of escape. Cestius retired from before the city, without any visible cause; and this panic, which induced the Jews to persevere in their mad rebellion, enabled the Christians to obey the precepts of their Divine Master, and make their escape. Most of them retired to Pella, beyond the Jordan, where they continued to the end of the war, and not a single Christian was involved in the dreadful calamities which overtook Jerusalem.

The destruction of the Jewish nation appears to have produced a deep and melancholy impression on all the Christian churches. The Jewish Christians, who had fled from Jerusalem, were dispersed throughout Asia, and could only expect relief from their Gentile brethren; when thus brought into close contact with the converted Gentiles they gradually laid aside their former prejudices, and abandoned the observances which had hitherto kept them separate. Some, indeed, still adhered to their old Jewish customs, and formed the sects of the Ebionites and Nazarenes, but the great majority seem to have acquiesced in the belief, that the Mosaic dispensation ended with the temple, and that Judaism had become nothing more than an empty name.

To this desirable result the example and the writings of St. John, now the last survivor of the apostles, eminently contributed. His first epistle is, in a great

degree, an essay on the duty of love between Christian brethren, and this duty is deduced from the common benefits that they had derived from the *new* dispensation; he makes no reference to the old, nor to any distinctions between classes of believers. In fact, the epistle is so obviously designed to further a union which had commenced, and strengthen a bond of peace already formed, that we may safely ascribe it to the period when the exiles from Palestine were seeking, or had obtained admission, into the Christian communities of Asia. From the third brief epistle we find that St. John lived in habits of close friendship with the Gentile converts. He calls Gaius, to whom the letter is addressed, his "well-beloved," though from the name he must have been a Roman; he bears testimony to the merit of Demetrius, who was obviously a Greek; and the only other person mentioned, Diotrephes, of whom he complains, must also have been of Greek descent. This may account for his avoiding to notice the destruction of Jerusalem in any of his writings; the mention of it might have revived the prejudices of the Jew, and reminded the Gentile that such prejudices had existed.

St. John's Gospel bears internal evidence that it was written after the union had been effected between the Jewish and Gentile converts, and many passages of it will be found to bear closely on the strengthening of the bonds by which they were united. It asserts the divinity of Christ, and the universality of the Christian dispensation, more frequently and more directly than the preceding gospels, and this not merely to

confute the heresies which began to appear, but to impress upon Christians of every class that they were one flock under one Shepherd.

The general persecution directed against the Christians by Domitian, had a considerable influence in cementing the union between the Jewish and Christian converts. It is probable that this capricious tyrant, who claimed to be worshipped with divine honours, was jealous of the reverence paid to Christ as God, and King, but, at the same time, was ignorant of the spiritual nature of our Lord's kingdom. Indeed, he appears to have believed that Christ was his living rival, for he commanded a search to be made for the descendants of David in Judæa; the grandsons of St. Jude were, in consequence, arrested, but when they were examined they so plainly stated the purely spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, that they were acquitted and dismissed without injury. Such an event must have had great effect in dispelling any lingering delusions respecting the temporal reign of the Messiah, and, consequently, must have abated the pride of the Jews, which was the chief cause of their refusing to unite with the Gentiles.

The triumph of Christianity over Judaism was now complete. Christ's kingdom was established; it was governed only by His laws, ruled in His name, and characterized by His institutions. Moses was no longer regarded as one of the legislators for believers, Christ alone was Head of his Church. St. John lived to witness this consummation, and thus the prophecy was fulfilled, that he should not "taste of death until

he saw the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Hence we may, perhaps, derive some reason for the canon of Scripture being closed by the book of Revelations: all Christians were united into one body, there was no distinction between Jew or Gentile, bond or free; the new dispensation was established, the Church was formed, and then the Holy Spirit revealed the types of its future progress, having its consummation in the day of final retribution. Similar types were given to the Jewish church when it was established at Sinai,—but those of Judaism were outward and sensible, for they belonged to a temporal dispensation; while those of Christianity were given in mysterious vision, because they relate to a spiritual kingdom.

The late Rev. Mr. Wilson, in his *Illustration of the New Testament*, has given a very succinct and able account of the abandonment of Judaism by the Christian converts, to which we earnestly direct the attention of our readers, and shall therefore conclude this chapter by quoting the entire passage from his interesting work.

"From the testimony of Celsus confirmed by the acquiescence of Origen, it appears, that the great body of Jewish Christians in the second century believed in the Divinity of Christ; and, from the united testimonies of both these writers, we also may conclude, that most of them had relinquished all distinctive marks of Judaism, and were not different from Gentile Christians. Several causes, we know, existed sufficient to produce this last effect; and without it,

we should be at a loss to account for the disappearance of the Jewish Christians after the first century.

“The account given by Celsus and Origen of the desertion of the literal observance of the Mosaic Law by the Jewish Christians is also confirmed by other writers.

“Sulpicius Severus, speaking of the orders of Adrian to drive all Jews from Jerusalem, observes, that ‘this measure was serviceable to the Christian faith; because at that time nearly all believed Christ to be God with the observance of the Law; the Lord so disposing it, that the servitude of the Law should be removed from the liberty of the faith and of the Church. Then was Mark the first Gentile bishop at Jerusalem*.’

“This measure was serviceable to the Christian faith, because from that time the great body of Hebrew Christians exonerated themselves from the servitude of the Law; by which, as we know from Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Jerom, Christianity was then supposed to suffer degradation.

“In perfect conformity with these testimonies, Basil has represented the believing Jews as perfectly similar in their sentiments to the Gentile Christians, and forming with them one uniform body; which could

“* Quod quidem Christianæ fidei proficiebat; quia tum pene omnes Christum Deum sub legis observatione credebant. Nimirum id Domino ordinante dispositum ut legis servitus a libertate fidei atque ecclesiæ tolleretur. Ita tum primum Marcus ex gentibus apud Hierosolymam episcopus fuit. *Hist.* L. ii., c. xxxi.

not have been true, if the Jewish Christians had in general been Ebionites—who, long before his time, had not been permitted to rank among Christians.

“‘A portion of believers in Christ, *has been saved* from the whole of Israel: the election having been found in a few only: which portion acting as leaven to the Gentiles, has drawn them all over to *a resemblance of itself**.’

“On this testimony it may be remarked, that, in the time of Basil, the Ebionites had been in a state of excommunication for several ages; excluded, according to the common opinion, from future salvation, and not considered as Christians. No bodies of men could be more dissimilar than the Ebionites and Gentile Christians. When, therefore, he declares, that a portion of believing Israelites was *saved*, and that the Gentile Christians had been brought over to *a resemblance* of them, his testimony to the early existence of other Jewish Christians besides Ebionites is no less decisive than that of Celsus and Origen.

“By comparing the accounts given of the first Hebrew Christians by the earliest ecclesiastical historians, with the history of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul, in the New Testament, the state of opinion among them, and the changes in

“* Τὸ μέντοι μέρος τῶν πιστευσάντων εἰς Χριστὸν διεσώθη ἀπὸ τοῦ πάντος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ· ἐν ὀλίγοις εὗρεθείσης τῆς ἐκλογῆς· ὅπερ ὡς ζύμη γενόμενον τοῖς ἔθνεσι, πάντας πρὸς τὴν οἰκίαν ἔλκυσεν ὁμοιότητα. BASIL *Comm. in Esaiam*, p. 306. Ed. Paris, 1721.

their manners, may be collected with great probability. At first, they were all rigorous observers of the Law of Moses, and insisted on imposing the same burden on Gentile converts: this made it necessary for the apostles, and others of the first teachers of Christianity, to insist strongly on the inutility of the ceremonial law: and the Epistle to the Hebrews appears to have been written for that purpose. In most of the churches before the end of the first century, the spirit of Judaism and the spirit of Christianity were found to be so much at variance, that, when the Epistle of Barnabas was written, the abolition of the literal observance of the Law was regularly taught; and Christians were informed, that an obedience to the precepts of the Gospel was the *true spiritual* observance of the Law. ‘God has manifested to us by all the prophets, that he has no occasion for our sacrifices, or burnt offerings, or oblations; saying, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices, &c.* These things therefore *hath God abolished*, that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of any such necessity, might have an offering becoming men†.’—‘But why did Moses say, Ye shall not eat of the swine, neither the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the crow, &c.? I answer, that under this outside figure he comprehended three *spiritual* doctrines, that were to be gathered from thence.’—‘Moses therefore, speaking as concerning

“* Isaiah i. 11—14.

“† Ep. Barn. § ii. Wake’s Transl.

meats, delivered indeed three great precepts to them in the *spiritual* signification of those commands. But they, according to the desires of the flesh, understood him, as if he had only meant it of meats*.’

“At length, about the end of the first century, Judaism was expressly prohibited in the churches, which were composed of Gentiles and Jews. Ignatius (about A.D. 107)—declares, ‘It is absurd to call yourselves by the name of Christians and to judaize†;’ and, ‘If any one shall preach the Jewish Law unto you, hearken not unto him‡.’ At that time, the literal observance of the Mosaic Law was neither tolerated nor entirely abolished: no separate privilege is allowed to Gentile Christians as distinguished from Jews, nor to Jewish Christians as distinguished from Gentiles. The great object of his Epistles is to inculcate uniformity of faith and manners; to worship God in the same place, and in the same manner: and in the Epistles to the Magnesians and Philadelphians, in particular, all Christians, without exception, are warned against Jewish customs.

“‘I exhort you that ye study to do all things in a divine concord.—Let there be nothing that may be able to make a division among you. But, be ye united to your bishop, and those who preside over you, to be your pattern and direction in the way to immortality. As therefore the Lord did nothing

“* Sect. x.

“† Epistle to the Magnesians, § x.

“‡ Epistle to the Philadelphians, § vi.

without the Father being united to him, neither by himself nor yet by his apostles; so neither do ye any thing without your bishop and presbyters: neither endeavour to let anything appear rational to yourselves apart; but being come together into the same place, have one common prayer; one supplication; one mind; one hope; in charity and in joy undefiled. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is better. Wherefore, come ye all together as unto one temple of God; as to one altar; as to one Jesus Christ, who proceeded from one Father; and exists in one, and is returned to one.'

"'Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For, if we still continue to live according to the Jewish Law, we do confess ourselves not to have received grace*.—These things, my beloved, I write unto you; not that I know any among you that lie under this error: but, as one of the least among you, I am desirous to forewarn you, that ye fall not into the snares of vain doctrine†.'

"This was the language in which the Jewish Christians were addressed by the rulers of the Christian church at the end of the first century. The literal observance of their ancient law was at that time as severely reprobated as the strange doctrines of new heresies; and, about thirty years later, such was the

* Epistle to the Magnesians, § vi., vii., viii. Wake's Translation.

† Sect. xi.

general abhorrence of Judaism, that any Christian who professed it, was very commonly supposed to be excluded from salvation*.

“The opinion, that every true Christian was a true follower of the ritual law, which had long prevailed among Christians, would have a stronger tendency to induce the Jewish Christians to abandon the laws of their ancestors than the violence of their Gentile brethren; and these causes, joined to others, appear to have produced the effect that might reasonably be expected: for, after the middle of the second century, there are neither any traces of churches composed partly of Jews and partly of Gentiles, like those in the first age of Christianity, nor of Ebionites† existing separate from the churches anywhere, except in a few‡ places in the East.

“* Justin Martyr, p. 230, *et seq.* Ed. Thirlby. ¶

“† It is probable, that all the Ebionites, at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, bore no proportion to the number of Jewish Christians in Palestine alone, in the reign of Trajan, after the rescript of that Emperor, in favour of the Christians. Eusebius speaks (hyperbolically, no doubt,) of Justus, one of the Hebrew bishops, as one of the myriads of those of the circumcision, who believed in Christ. Ἰουδαῖός τις ὄνομα Ἰουδτος, μυρίων ὄσων ἐκ περιτομῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν τηνικαῦτα πεπιστευκότων εἰς καὶ αὐτὸς ὢν. *Hist. L. III. c. xxxv.*

“‡ We must not suppose, that the Nazarean or Ebionæan Christians existed in many parts of the East, from a confused sentence in Jerom. Quid dicam de Hebionitis, qui Christianos esse se simulant? Usque hodie per *totas Orientis synagogas* inter Judæas hæresis est quæ dicitur Mineorum, et a Pharissæis nunc usque damnatur, quos vulgo Nazaræos nuncupant, qui

“The Jewish Christians must therefore, in general, have abandoned their distinctive customs in most of the Christian churches in the first century, or the beginning of the second: and they would probably be followed in this by most of the members of the church of Jerusalem, after Adrian had prohibited all Jews from approaching the neighbourhood of their native city.

“The ancient testimonies, by which we prove, what is beforehand in the highest degree probable, are those of Celsus, Origen, and Sulpicius Severus: to whom Basil may also be joined. From the positive testimonies of these writers, joined to the consideration of the disappearance of Jewish Christians in the second century, in most parts of the world where they had existed before, we may conclude with certainty, that they had assimilated themselves

credunt in Christum, filium dei, natum, de virgine Mariâ, et eum dicunt esse, qui sub Pontio Pilato passus est, et resurrexit, in guem et nos credimus: sed dum volunt et Judæi esse et Christiani, nec Judæi sunt nec Christiani. Opera Tom. i., p. 634. Ed. Lutet. 1624. A very judicious explanation of this passage has not been sufficiently attended to. The imprecations which the Jews uttered thrice every day in their public prayers against Christians, under the name of Nazarenes, ‘were composed some years before the destruction of Jerusalem, according to the chronology of Semach David, and were not concealed; but *the empire growing Christian*, the Jews feared they should fall under the lash of the civil power for these their wicked prayers, and therefore pretended, that they meant only a sect of their own, called Nazareans or Minæans, and imposed so far upon St. Jerom as to make him believe [them.]’ MANGEY’S *Rem. on Nazarenus*, p. 7.

to Gentile Christians: and the year 136 has been with great probability assigned as the time, when the secession from the Mosaic ritual took place, among the members of the Church of Jerusalem*.”

“* DU FRESNOY’S *Chronological Table*, and ECHARD’S *Ecclesiastical History*, under the year 136, and MOSHEIM *de Rebus ante Constantinum*, p. 324.”

CHAPTER X.

CONDITION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AT
THE CLOSE OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

DURING the apostolic age Christianity was opposed to Judaism in a double sense: the unconverted Jews aimed at its destruction, some of the converted Jews sought its division and corruption; when the efforts of both were defeated, "the kingdom of God and his Son" was *established*, and the duties which now devolved on its administrators were limited to its preservation and extension. This change in the condition of Christianity necessarily produced a marked difference between the functions of the apostles and their successors; the apostles had to *establish* new truths, and were, therefore, invested with the power of working miracles; their successors had to *preserve* these truths, and, therefore, only needed to perpetuate the evidence by which these truths were originally established. "A miracle and a new revelation go together*." Christ wrought miracles to prove the additional truths that he revealed beyond those contained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but he gave no "sign," though often urged to do so, either to prove the truth of preceding revelations, or the inferences he deduced from them: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii., 71.

from the dead*.” Miraculous powers ceased when “the Son of man was come in his kingdom,” and with them terminated the ministration and usages connected with their exercise.

The duty of the successors of the apostles was ‘to preserve the faith; hence St. John, in his address to the Seven Churches, urges them “to do their first works,”—“to hold fast that which they had received,”—“to be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain.” Now the apostles, in thus giving to their successors functions different from their own, must have foreseen the necessity of furnishing the means for the discharge of those functions. They must have seen that Christianity was not only to be established, but to be perpetuated. One important means for this perpetuation was recording the Christian doctrines, and the evidence by which they were established. It is not necessary to enter into an examination of the contents of the New Testament; it is sufficient to say that the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles record the facts of the Christian scheme, and the Epistles give an authorised interpretation of such facts as were misapprehended in the apostolic age, and of those also which have the most direct reference to the great mystery of redemption.

The churches were necessarily the guardians of the sacred record, the witnesses to its authenticity, and the dispensers of the sacred truths it contained. They had also the dispensation of “the means of Grace;” but

* Luke xvi. 31.

in this function their discretionary power was limited by the written record, which might be regarded as their "charter of incorporation." It was of advantage to Christianity that the churches were at the first independent of each other, confederated indeed by a spirit of love and common faith, but not subjected to a common rule or government; each church was thus an independent witness to the truth and genuineness of the Sacred record, and any error committed by one, could be corrected by the testimony preserved in another. Indeed, the canon of the New Testament appears to have been formed by a comparison and interchange of the records between the several churches, and hence it is entitled to more authority than it could have derived from the sanction of any single body, even if that body had been a general Council.

"The authority on which we rest our conviction of the genuineness of the New Testament Scriptures," says Archbishop Whately, "is of the same *kind*, though incomparably *stronger in degree* than that on which we receive the ancient classics. For it is not to the Roman world, in its widest acceptation, but to the *literary* portion of it, that we appeal, in respect of any volume of the classics. On the contrary, the Christian Scriptures were addressed to all classes; (the doctrine of what is called 'Reserve,'—of putting the light of the Gospel under a bushel,—being no part of the apostolic system,) so that probably for one reader of Cicero or Livy, there were more than fifty persons,—even in a very early period of the Church,—anxious to possess copies of the New Testament

Scriptures, and careful, in proportion to the high importance of the subject, as to the genuineness and accuracy of what they read. On this point, I will take the liberty of citing the words of an eminent writer from an unpublished discourse, delivered a good many years ago at Oxford, in a course of lectures.

“‘Nothing is more remarkable in Christianity than the care and anxiety with which the early Christians examined the pretensions of any writing to be received as the work of an apostle. This will also account for the interval of time which elapsed before all the books of the Canon became generally received. It does not, indeed, appear that the genuineness of any of the four Gospels was ever doubted; but the Epistles being addressed to particular churches, and at various times, it must have required for one of these some interval before its communication could take place throughout every country in which the Gospel was preached, accompanied by such evidence as would be satisfactory to every other church. * * As soon as can be supposed possible, the Christians of all countries remarkably agreed in receiving them as canonical; while the hesitation of a few, proves only that this agreement was not a hasty or careless assent, but a deliberate and unbiassed judgment. * * It cannot be too strongly pressed upon your attention, that the credit of a canon thus compared, is infinitely greater than if it had rested *on the authority of some general Council*. For the decision of a Council is the decision of a majority only: whereas, this is ratified

by the voice of every separate church. It is, moreover, the decision, not of one meeting, or of one age, but the uncontradicted *belief* of *all* the first churches, spreading generally and naturally as the Gospel spread: a belief which was not impaired *by authority*, but was the result of their own cautious and independent examination.'

"I have dwelt thus fully on this subject, because I believe there are not a few, who, being accustomed to hear the authority of the primitive Church spoken of, as that in which we receive the New Testament Scriptures, are led to fancy it the authority of *some one society acting collectively*, and in its corporate capacity; and thus they lose sight of the very circumstance on which the chief force of this testimony depends; namely, that there was no decree or decision of any one society, but—what has far more weight—the concurring independent convictions of a great number of distinct churches, in various regions of the world."

The triumph of Christianity over the dangers, external and internal, to which it had been exposed in the struggle against Judaism, was soon followed by a contest of a different nature against the corruptions attempted to be introduced from pagan philosophy. At this time, the influence of Grecian and Roman idolatry, considered as a religious system, was at an end;—the gross fables respecting the gods were received in their literal sense by nobody, not even by the lowest vulgar; a system of mystic interpretation was introduced; it was said that these fables had a symbolic

meaning, and great ingenuity was displayed in guessing at the purport of these supposed parables. The general cultivation of philosophy increased this rage for mystic interpretation, particularly in the schools of Alexandria, where Grecian philosophy, in the strength of youth, was brought into close contact with the antiquated superstitions of Asia and Egypt.

No system, totally false, ever succeeded among mankind; the Alexandrian philosophers had caught a glimpse of an important truth, but their view of it was imperfect and distorted. They saw that there were traditional fragments of an older and purer religion in all the systems of paganism, and they trusted by their superior knowledge to discover that truth, and harmonize all these jarring systems. For this purpose they adopted the Eastern theory of successive *Æons*, or emanations from the Deity, and indulged themselves in the wildest speculations on their nature and their relation to God and the universe.

Many of the Jews who had settled in Alexandria, applied this philosophy to the Mosaic revelation, and carried the rage for allegorizing the simple statements of Scripture to a most extravagant extent. They spread their doctrines among their countrymen, and several of the Jews who became Christians, carried the taste for "foolish questions," and "endless genealogies," into the Church. This system was named gnosticism (from the Greek *gnosis*, knowledge,) because those who adopted it, laid exclusive claim to knowledge of the secret and hidden meaning of revelation.

Gnosticism appears to have had most success with the Judaizing Christians; after having long contended for the liberal observance of the Law, they took refuge in the system of allegorical interpretation when the destruction of Jerusalem rendered their first object impracticable. The mixture of Gentile philosophy with ancient Judaism and Christianity could not produce a uniform system; Gnosticism was divided into a countless variety of sects, and its teachers were not less opposed to each other than they were all to the simple purity of the Gospel. It is, therefore, difficult to give an accurate view of their principles; but the following may be regarded as the prominent features of their system.

They believed that the world was created by an emanation from the Deity, whom they named Demiurgus, and that he, working on the evil principle, matter, had produced a universe exposed to crime, misery, and disorder. They looked upon Christ as a later Æon, or emanation, sent to remedy the evil which had originated with the Demiurgus, and they destroyed the doctrine of the union of the divine with the human nature, by framing a distinction between Christ and Jesus; in some cases they went as far as to suppose the latter to have been merely a phantom. One sect, the Nicolaitans, mentioned by St. John in the book of Revelations, appears to have regarded the pagan deities as Æons, partaking of the divine character, for they joined in the heathen sacrifices whenever they were required to do so by authority.

Ecclesiastical history informs us that the early

leaders of the Gnostics were Simon Magus, Menander, Dositheus, and Cerinthus. We are informed in the Acts of the Apostles that Simon was a native of Samaria, who had imposed himself upon his countrymen as a superior being, and was called by them "the great power of God." He admitted the divine mission of Christ, and appears to have been at the first a sincere convert to the truth. But he subsequently returned to his impostures, declaring that he was an Æon, or emanation from the Divinity, superior to Christ, and he travelled over the Roman empire proclaiming his pretensions. He is said to have been killed by a fall at Rome, while pretending or attempting to fly from the Capitol. Such was the strength of the delusion propagated by this impostor, that he not only had a multitude of disciples during his lifetime, but continued to be worshipped by the sect which he founded for more than two centuries after his death. Menander and Dositheus similarly claimed to be Æons, but the latter alone had any distinguished success.

Archbishop Whately's description of the German Transcendentalists of our own day is singularly applicable to the Gnostics of ancient times, who did not so much reject the Christian creed as explain it away by their unauthorized and fanciful system of interpretation. As has been well said, "they were willing to *believe* what *you* pleased, provided they were allowed to *explain* it as they pleased." "The German Transcendentalists," says the archbishop, "whose system of theology, or rather of atheology, is little else than a new edition of the Pantheism of the ancient heathen

philosophers, of the Brahmins, and the Buddhists, use a double-meaning language. They profess Christianity, and employ profusely such terms as 'God,' 'faith,' 'incarnation,' 'miracle,' 'immortality,' &c., attaching to these words a meaning quite remote from what is commonly understood by them. Their 'god' is the god of Pantheism; not a personal agent, but a certain vital principle diffused through the material universe, and of which every human soul is a portion; which is at death to be reabsorbed into the infinite spirit, and become just what it was before birth, exactly according to the ancient system of philosophy described by Virgil,—

Mens agitat molem et toto se corpore miscet

Inde cominum pecudumque genus, &c.

And the other terms alluded to are understood by them in a sense no less wide from the popular acceptance*.”

The three impostors just mentioned were false Christs rather than false teachers; they opposed Christianity, by setting up a rival religion. On the other hand, Cerinthus was a corrupter of religion; he introduced Gnosticism into the Christian scheme, and asserted that all his idle and impious fancies would be deduced from the records of revelation. It is generally believed that St. John's Gospel was written to refute the false doctrine of Cerinthus, and that, therefore, the Evangelist was careful at the very beginning to show that the Word which was made flesh was no

* Note P, Kingdom of Christ, Second Edition.

emanation, but “in the beginning was with God, and was God.”

The necessity of preventing the diffusion of such erroneous doctrines must early have taught the churches the expediency of adopting some creed or profession of faith as a test to distinguish those who were truly its members from those who were “false brethren.” Whether that which is commonly called “The Apostles’ Creed,” was composed by the apostles themselves may be doubted; but that it existed in substance at a very early period, is evident from the writings of Irenæus, who flourished in the second century. He had been the pupil of the martyr Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of St. John, and his statement of apostolic doctrine is, therefore, almost that of a cotemporary. The following is his account of the system of Christian doctrine. “The Church, though it be dispersed over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other, has received from the apostles and their disciples the belief in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and all things in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Ghost, who preached by the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advent, nativity of a virgin, passion, resurrection from the dead, and bodily ascension into heaven of the flesh of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and his coming again from heaven in the glory of the Father, to restore all things, and raise the flesh of all mankind; that according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things

in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, to Jesus Christ, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King; and that every tongue should confess to him; and that he may exercise just judgment upon all, and may send spiritual wickedness, and the transgressing and apostate angels, with all ungodly, unrighteous, lawless, and blaspheming men into everlasting fire; but, having granted life to all righteous and holy men, that keep his commandments and persevere in his love, some from the beginning, others after repentance, on them he may bestow the gift of immortality, and invest them with eternal glory."

The author adds, "Neither the churches established in Germany, nor those of Spain and Gaul, nor those in the countries of the East, in Egypt, Libya, or the middle of the world (*i. e.*, the centre of the Roman empire), believe or teach differently in any respect." This agreement refers only to the substance of the doctrine, not to the exact words in which it is stated, for we find that almost every church had its own creed, "shaped with reference to its peculiar dangers of faith from without, or the prejudices of its own members within. Thus, as far back as we can trace the history of the early creeds, that of Jerusalem was always distinct from that of Cæsarea or Antioch; and all these, again, from those of Alexandria or of Rome; and this during the period of harmony between these churches*."

The Lord's-day was universally observed; the Jewish

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii., 253.

Sabbath was but partially revered. Divine worship consisted in prayers, hymns, the reading of the Scriptures, and letters from the churches; to which was added, a popular exposition of some passage of holy writ, more in the form of a lecture than a sermon. It is not certain whether *forms* of public prayer were prepared for the churches, but it probable that they were used in many places. The beautiful prayer with which Clement of Rome concludes his Epistle to the Corinthians appears well calculated for public use, and as the epistle was written in the name of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, it is not unreasonable to suppose that this prayer was offered by the church conjointly. It is as follows:—

“May the all-seeing God, the ruler of spirits and Lord of all flesh, who has chosen the Lord Jesus Christ, and us by him for a peculiar people, grant unto every soul that calls upon his glorious and holy name, faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, temperance, holiness, and wisdom, unto all well-pleasing, through our high priest and advocate Jesus Christ; through whom be unto Him all glory, majesty, might, and honour, now and for evermore. Amen.”

To the purity of Christian morals at this period we have the strongest testimony—that of an adversary. Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, says, “They meet on a certain day before it is light, and address themselves in a form of prayer* to Christ as to some god, binding

* A form of prayer in alternate portions; that is, a liturgy with responses.

themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which, it is their custom to separate, and then re-assemble, to eat in common a harmless meal."

The "solemn oath" to which Pliny refers may have been the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, from which all notorious offenders were excluded, and to which all who were admitted professed repentance for their past sins and a sincere desire to follow the commandments of God, and "walk henceforth in his holy ways*." The common meals of the Christians were the *agapæ*, or "feasts of love," which in the apostolic age had great influence in maintaining the brotherly affection and charity for which the early Christians were remarkable.

But the pure lives of the Christians did not save them from persecution; the very letter that bears such honourable testimony to their character, points them out as fit objects of punishment on account of their "contumacious and inflexible obstinacy." The great success of Christianity, which is also noticed in this document, appears to be the reason why the heathen raged so furiously. "This contagious superstition," says Pliny, "is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the country villages." He goes on to lament that the temples had been almost

* See before, Chapter IV.

deserted in Asia, that the sacred solemnities had been intermitted, and that there was no demand for victims to offer in sacrifice. This change must have greatly diminished the gains of those who, like Demetrius of Ephesus, derived employment from the gorgeous pageantry of idolatry; and it must also have excited the rage of the rabble, when they ceased to be gratified with pompous shows and splendid processions. Hence the persecutions to which the Christians were exposed from the Gentiles were not always authorized by the magistrates and emperors; they were frequently outbreaks of popular prejudice and fury, excited by interested calumny and continued by sheer ignorance. "Hence it happened that the sacrifice of one or two conspicuous objects, which would have been insufficient and weak as a political measure for suppressing the sect, was often enough to stay persecution*."

Martyrdom under such circumstances was like the fabled self-devotion of Curtius; the martyr died a witness for the truth, but he also died to protect the Church by giving its enemies an object on which to exhaust their rage. The bishop died to save his flock, the presbyter's life was sacrificed for his congregation.

At such a time the feelings of a martyr must have been somewhat similar to those of a soldier volunteering on a forlorn hope; he was almost sure to fall, but his death was the only means of ensuring victory. These circumstances filled the early martyrs with a zeal and enthusiasm almost amounting to a thirst for

* HINDS' *Christianity*, ii., 269.

death, which can scarcely be comprehended without a diligent attention to the peculiarities of the age, and the circumstances by which they were surrounded. Ignatius may be said to have courted martyrdom when he presented himself to the Emperor Trajan, but ambition of fame, or a desire of being revered after death, had no share in his motives. Trajan had from the commencement of his reign permitted, if not encouraged, some of those bursts of popular violence ever ready to break out against the Christians. His arrival at Antioch was therefore regarded by the bishop, Ignatius, as a warning of imminent peril to the Church. He boldly met the danger by presenting himself to the emperor, and asserting the divinity of Christ before his tribunal. Sentence of condemnation was pronounced against him in the following terms: "Forasmuch as Ignatius has confessed that he carries about within himself Him that was crucified, we command that he be carried, bound by soldiers, to the great Rome, there to be thrown to the beasts for the entertainment of the people."

From the form of this sentence it seems that Trajan at this period, regarded Christianity as something worse than "an absurd and excessive superstition," as it was subsequently described by Pliny. He appears to have regarded the homage paid to Christ as inconsistent with the allegiance due to the emperor, and this error seems to have been adopted by many of his successors, since the test enjoined was "to swear by the fortune of the emperor;" or "by the genius of Cæsar." Nothing short of divine honours could satisfy

the pride of imperial despotism, and as these were refused by the Christians, they were regarded as traitors to the state. Similar feelings seem in later times to have animated the despots of China and Japan; they were jealous that those honours were paid to Christ which they had impiously arrogated to themselves.

As the Christian communities felt that the martyrs were not only sacrificed for the truth, but for the preservation of the churches, they naturally held their memory in the highest honour. They assembled round their graves at the anniversary of their martyrdom, and there celebrated divine worship with the Lord's Supper, as on the Lord's day; they read also some account of the life and death of the saint whom they commemorated, usually called "the acts of the martyr," and made collections for the poor. From this innocent and laudable custom several evils arose, which greatly injured the purity of Christianity; it sometimes produced an eagerness for martyrdom, not quite consistent with the mildness and gentleness of the Christian character; there were those who "gave their bodies to be burned, but had not charity." At the commemoration of a martyr, it was scarcely possible to prevent some feelings of indignation arising against the authors of his death, and some anticipations of divine vengeance overtaking his persecutors. An earthquake, a pestilence, or a famine following any outbreak of popular hatred, or any persecution countenanced by authority, would be represented by heated imaginations as a display of God's righteous

anger for the slaughter of his saints. The punishments inflicted on the Jews for their lapses into idolatry, would be represented as types of the vengeance which was about to overtake the entire heathen world, and these gloomy presages not being kept secret, necessarily increased the alarm with which the masses of the populace viewed the progress of a new religion.

Other corruptions followed: the "acts of the martyr" were interpolated with the vague legends of tradition, and with the inventions of perverted fancy; the commemoration gradually lost the simple character of grateful remembrance, and assumed that of homage or worship, until the saints and martyrs were invested with something of a mediatorial character, and invoked as intercessors.

There was an interesting interval between the triumph of Christianity over Judaism, and its avowed claim to be the religion of mankind, but it is not easy to fix the precise limits of its duration. Viewing, however, the amalgamation of Jewish and Gentile converts, after the fall of Jerusalem, as the termination of the apostolic age, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom, we may assume the general persecution in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, as the declaration of war on the part of heathenism against that kingdom. During the intervening time the character of the dangers to which the Christian Church was exposed, externally and internally, had quite changed their character. The Jews were not the only, nor even the principal persecutors of believers, though to a much

later period they exhibited their hostility to the Christians, by readily joining with the populace whenever a clamour was raised against them.

The purity of the faith was not so much assailed by attempts to enforce the Mosaic ritual, as by an attempt to mix up with its simple purity the wild dreams of the Oriental philosophers, and the metaphysical speculations of the Greeks. To the Church collectively, as to every individual who composes it, each succeeding age has brought its own peculiar trials, and the dangers of corruption have been averted only by referring to its written record—the sacred testament of its Founder.

During the interval we have had under consideration, the form of Church government assumed a greater degree of fixity and permanence. The bishop's office was separated from that of the rest of the clergy, and the various persons engaged in the ministry formed clearer notions of their several functions. The clergy gained more authority as a body by this change; they were not merely the guides and teachers of the people, but they were also the arbitrators of private differences, and, probably, in some cases they employed the discipline of the Church to give force to their sentences. This power, however, was not sought by the clergy, it was forced upon them by the circumstances of the time and by the wishes of the laity. Had a form of congregational government, a Christian democracy, been desirable, it would still have been unattainable; there were no means for convening elective assemblies; there was no machinery for

taking the votes of congregations*. In truth, the Christians of this age had nothing to direct their attention to the subject. Compressed together by community of danger, they never thought of debating who should take the perilous station of bishop; the office fell to the worthiest and most courageous by a kind of tacit consent. The younger clergy were trained as disciples of the bishop, and when a vacancy in any of the churches occurred, one or other of them filled it, without anything like a formal appointment. Unquestionably the tendency of events was to make

* "The pretended first Council at Jerusalem," says Archbishop Whately, "does seem to me a most extraordinary chimæra, without any warrant whatever from sacred history. We find in the narrative, that certain persons, coming from Jerusalem to Antioch, endeavoured to impose on the Gentile converts the yoke of the Mosaic Law; pretending—as appears plainly from the context—to have the sanction of the Apostles for this. Nothing could be more natural than the step which was thereupon taken—to send a deputation to Jerusalem, to inquire whether these pretensions were well-founded. The Apostles, in the midst of an assembly of the Elders (or clergy, as they would now be called) of Jerusalem, decided that no such burden ought to be imposed, and that their pretended sanction had not been given. The Church at Jerusalem, even independently of the Apostles, had, of course, power to decide this last point, *i. e.*, to declare the fact whether they had or had not given the pretended sanction; and the Apostles confessedly had plenary power to declare the will of the Lord Jesus. And the deputation accordingly retired satisfied. There is no hint throughout of any summons to the several Churches in Judæa and Galilee, in Samaria, Cyprus, Cyrene, &c., to send deputations as to a general council; nor any assumption of a right in the *Church* of Jerusalem, as such, to govern the rest or decide on points of faith."—*Kingdom of Christ*. Essay II.

the form of church government something of a self-elected aristocracy, but this was not sought by the clergy; it arose from the laity having neither the opportunity nor the will to interfere with the regulations of their spiritual pastors. Every one knew that the moral influence which a bishop possessed was held at the imminent peril of martyrdom; it was an office that had nothing tempting for earthly ambition, and therefore there was little chance of any dispute arising when it became necessary to supply a vacancy. It is probable that there was no fixed rule for determining episcopal succession, and that when vacancies occurred, the mode of appointment varied according to the circumstances of the occasion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONTEST BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND
PAGANISM.

NOTWITHSTANDING occasional persecutions, the Christian religion continued steadily to advance after the apostles had been removed from the earth. In the middle of the second century, a circumstance of no great moment in itself, but of some importance in estimating the position of the Church at the time, shows us that the Christian communities, though independent of each other, began to see the importance of uniformity in discipline and doctrine, a proof that they had made great progress, and looked forward to a still further extension of the faith. The churches of Asia differed from those of Alexandria and Rome respecting the keeping of the "Paschal day," or anniversary of Christ's death. They both kept "the great week," or, as it was sometimes called, "Passion week," as a solemn fast; but the Asiatics, like the Jews, celebrated their Paschal feast on the fourteenth of the first Jewish month, while the Western churches celebrated it on the night preceding the anniversary of the resurrection, thus connecting the commemoration of our Lord's crucifixion with his triumph over death and the grave. Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, came to Rome during the reign of Antoninus Pius, to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the means of putting an end to this difference.

Their conference was without effect; neither party would recede; but the bishops agreed at parting, that the controversy should not be permitted to break the bonds of Christian charity.

The Apologies for Christianity, publicly presented to the emperors, contain further proof that the religion was now emerging from obscurity into importance, and that it had begun to assert its claims to more than a rivalry with paganism. The Christian advocates were not contented with acting on the defensive; they arraigned, in forcible terms, the folly and impurity of polytheism, and they circulated prophecies foretelling the speedy overthrow of the system. Rome appears to have been designated "Babylon" so early as the time of St. Peter, and many modern interpreters believe that the visions of the Apocalypse relate to the overthrow of its pagan pride and power. Whether it was so understood in the second century may be fairly doubted; but there is no question that many Christians applied its terrible imagery and fearful denunciations to the pagan system, by which they were at once injured and disgusted. On the other hand, the advocates of paganism taught, and most probably believed, that the prosperity of the empire depended on the continued protection of the tutelary deities that had raised it to such greatness. They attributed every calamity to the anger of the offended gods, and they saw in the signs of its declining majesty, evidence that the deities who had protected it were beginning to be alienated. The influence of superstitious terror was thus added to the strength of bigotry, and it

wanted but some sudden panic to render the torrent irresistible.

The virtuous lives and pure morals of the Christians still further exasperated their adversaries; in an age of general licentiousness, they were living reproaches to all around. They abstained from attending the brutal games and gladiatorial shows to which the Roman populace was so madly addicted as to deem them a sufficient recompense for the loss of freedom; and hence it was concluded that the ascendancy of their religion, to which the Christians confessedly looked forward, would lead to the abolition of the cruel sports and sanguinary spectacles of the circus. It was further seen that Christianity would admit of no compromise with paganism in any of its varied forms. The Fathers of the Church had firmly repudiated gnosticism, with all its attractive speculations on the nature of Deity and the universe; they rejected the Ammonian philosophy, which pretended to make a harmony out of all the religions in existence, and though some eminent Christians evinced a greater attachment to Grecian philosophy than was desirable, they employed it rather as a means for extending the faith, than as a substitute for Gospel truth. It was impossible to disguise or doubt the perilous position of paganism; it had to struggle, not for supremacy, but for existence.

A series of calamities, in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, brought matters to a crisis. The Tiber overflowed its banks, and sweeping away the magazines and granaries, produced a fearful famine in Rome; the army of Verus, returning from the Parthian war,

brought back the seeds of one of the most devastating plagues recorded in history; and the barbarian nations along the frontiers of the empire, threatened to retaliate the wrongs which Rome had inflicted on their ancestors. The emperor yielded to the general panic and delusion; he issued mandates permitting, if not commanding, the sacrifice of those whose neglect of the gods was supposed to have provoked their wrath. Marcus Aurelius had hitherto shown himself superior to the pagan superstitions, claiming to rank among the philosophers, and exhibiting in his speeches and writings a just sense of the independence of mind; from such a prince, the Christians might at least have expected toleration, if not a candid examination of the divine claims of their religion; but either philosophy gave way to superstition in the hour of danger, or the emperor believed that the extinction of Christianity was required by state policy.

Two eminent Christians deserve to be particularly noticed among the victims to this persecution: Justin Martyr, and Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna. Justin was of Greek descent, though born in the ancient capital of Samaria; an ardent love of truth led him to study the various systems of Greek philosophy, and finding the insufficiency of them all, he became a convert to Christianity. In the reign of Antoninus Pius he wrote his first *Apology for the Christians and their Religion*, which he presented to the emperor. It probably had some influence in promoting the security which the Church enjoyed during his reign, and Justin was encouraged to present a

second *Apology*, when a new persecution was menaced by Aurelius. But the philosophers whom the writer had abandoned, and the weakness of whose systems he forcibly exposed, had prejudiced the emperor against the voice of truth; indeed, Aurelius himself was one of their own party, for he delivered lectures on philosophy to the people himself, and his vanity was mortified by the little regard which the Christians paid to his imperial teaching. The *Apology* which Justin presented to Aurelius must have excited the emperor's anger, on account of its able exposure of the vanities of Greek philosophy, and he was therefore marked out as the earliest victim. He was sentenced to be beheaded, and several of the most eminent Christian teachers in Rome shared his fate.

The persecution extended to the provinces, and fell most heavily on the Asiatic Christians. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was the chief object of pagan rage; the veneration felt for him by the whole Christian world, his influence, so signally manifested by his journey to Rome, which averted a schism between the Eastern and Western churches, the prophetic testimony borne to his character by St. John*, and the respect which his virtues extorted from the pagans themselves, pointed him out as a victim, and a ferocious mob demanded that he should be sacrificed. The friends of the aged prelate with difficulty persuaded him to seek shelter in a neighbouring village; he had a dream which he believed to be a type that he would

* Revelations ii. 8—10.

be burned alive, and when a close pursuit commenced, he was reluctant to take the necessary precautions for concealment. Having been betrayed by one of his servants, he was brought prisoner to Smyrna, where he arrived late in the evening, and being led into the amphitheatre, he was commanded to abjure Christianity, and sacrifice to the gods. On his refusal, the multitude both of the Gentiles and of the Jews which dwelt in Smyrna, demanded that a lion should be loosed against Polycarp. This was refused by the president of the games, as the time for that species of spectacle was over, upon which they insisted that the obstinate Christian should be burned. A pile was quickly prepared by the infuriate multitude, the Jews being particularly conspicuous in exhibiting their rancour. They were about to nail him to the stake, when he said, "Let me alone as I am, for He who hath given me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to stand without moving in the pile."

When bound to the stake, Polycarp thanked God for having given him a part in the number of the martyrs, and as he concluded, fire was given to the pile. The Christians who witnessed the scene declared that a heavenly voice was heard to strengthen the martyr, and that his body remained unconsumed in the midst of the flames. His persecutors refused to give his body to his disciples, under the pretence that it might be made an object of worship, a calumny which the church of Smyrna, from whose interesting epistle these particulars are taken, indignantly contradicted.

The persecution extended to Gaul, where some deaconesses were put to death with barbarous tortures; but it is said to have been suspended by a miraculous event which led the emperor to look with respect on the God of the Christians. In the Marcomannic war, the Roman army became entangled in a barren defile, where they were destitute of water, and at the same time exposed to the scorching rays of a summer sun. Their enemies, posted on the surrounding mountains, only waited until their increasing weakness would render them an easy prey; when suddenly the sky became overcast with clouds, cooling showers fell on the exhausted Roman ranks, while a storm of thunder and lightning discharged itself with such fury on the barbarians, that they broke their ranks, and either fled towards their homes or surrendered to the Romans. This signal deliverance was ascribed by the pagans to the interference of Jupiter, or to the arts of a magician; while Christian writers assert that it was owing to the prayers of the Christian soldiers who served in the Roman army, and they add, that this was acknowledged in the letter which the emperor addressed to the senate, giving an account of his unexpected victory.

It is not necessary to discuss the evidence for and against this supposed miracle, because the facts most important to our history are admitted on all hands. It is conceded that Christians were serving in the Roman army, that they performed their duty faithfully, and that their conduct in the war gave them a just claim to the emperor's gratitude. It is true that

Aurelius does not appear to have issued any edict in favour of the Christians; but he published no fresh proclamation against them, and the flame of persecution, no longer fanned by the imperial authority, was gradually extinguished.

The accession of Commodus relieved the Church from oppression. He was himself regardless of any religion; but his favourite mistress, Marcia, is said to have been favourably disposed towards Christianity. Though the Church generally enjoyed peace, yet individual Christians continued to be exposed to bursts of persecution, until the increasing tyranny of Commodus, compelling his subjects to provide for their own safety, left them few opportunities of harassing their neighbours. The political convulsions which followed the murder of Commodus diverted attention from the progress of Christianity; in the rapid changes of the empire, the celebration of the national festivals and games, which invested paganism with such splendour and popularity, had fallen into neglect; the incentives to bigotry which they supplied were withdrawn, and probably, in so troubled a period, it was considered unsafe to permit large assemblies of the people. At such a calamitous time the blessings and consolations which Christianity alone afforded, were likely to win converts. Even in a worldly point of view, the bonds of love which still held Christians together, the mutual sympathies they exhibited, and the relief they were ever ready to afford to their suffering brethren, must have produced a powerful effect on the heathen. A Christian driven into exile, or

forced to seek safety in a foreign land, found a home wherever there was a church established; and so notorious was this hospitality, that advantage was sometimes taken of it by pretenders and impostors. Not less enviable was the tranquillity of mind produced by the Christian faith,—amid all the vicissitudes of fortune, he held firm to the Rock of his salvation; with him “to live was Christ, and to die was gain.” In consequence of the increasing number of converts, and the difficulty of distinguishing those who were actuated by pure motives, Christians were now divided into classes, the *Faithful* and the *Catechumens*; not, as has been supposed, in imitation of the heathen system of initiation, but as a necessary precaution required by the circumstances of the Church.

The Catechumens were those who had not completed the course of religious instruction and discipline which was deemed necessary for full admission into the community of the faithful. Their term of instruction lasted from one to three years, after which they received baptism. There does not appear to have been any fixed rule respecting the nature and amount of the instruction given; it probably varied according to the age, education, and sex of the Catechumens.

As Christianity spread the Christians were brought more immediately into contact with secular affairs, and the discipline of the Church was necessarily relaxed. It is probable, also, that among the increasing converts some obtained admission whose lives were not suitable to their profession; and hence many sincere believers would be disposed to adopt a more severe

test, and set up a higher standard of morals than the general Church had established. In effecting this, it was natural that many should run into the opposite extreme, and demand the observance of a rigid code inconsistent with "the liberty with which Christ has made us free." This was the error of the Montanists, so named from their founder Montanus; they insisted that Christians should abstain from public affairs, should mortify the flesh, should never fly to escape from persecution, and should never contract a second marriage. Their doctrines greatly disturbed the peace of the Church, but they soon ceased to be popular.

During the early part of the reign of Septimius Severus the Christians were protected by the emperor, but unfortunately this period of tranquillity was marked by the revival of the Paschal controversy between the churches of Italy and Asia. Victor, bishop of Rome, set the fatal example of usurping supremacy for his see over the independent churches; he pronounced sentence of excommunication on all who adhered to the Asiatic mode of celebrating Easter,—a sentence which included nearly all the Eastern churches. Several of the Western bishops protested against this usurpation, but none more strenuously than Irenæus, bishop of Lyons. Though his diocese was in Gaul, Irenæus was a native of Asia Minor, and had been a disciple of Polycarp; he was, therefore, well qualified to mediate between the opposing parties, and it was chiefly through his exertions that the danger of a schism was averted.

Many persons of rank and wealth had now em-

braced the profession of Christianity; the synods, or provincial councils, which began to be frequent, gave to the Christians a unity and organization which rendered them a formidable body in the state. This was especially the case in Western Asia, where paganism at the commencement of the third century appeared to have been quite overcome, a circumstance which so alarmed Severus, that when he visited Palestine, he issued an edict against all who should become proselytes to the Jewish or Christian religion. A new persecution ensued, but it was neither very general nor extensive: indeed, the emperor's edict appears to have been dangerous only when it afforded an opportunity for gratifying private malice. After the death of Severus the Church enjoyed rest, persecutions, with few exceptions, were unknown for nearly forty years, and during this period the form of government began to assume a more decided character of episcopacy, and the distinction between the clergy and laity was finally established.

No questions connected with the history of the Church have been more sharply contested than the origin of the distinctions between clergy and laity, and between bishops and presbyters. By some the institution of a hierarchy is ascribed to the apostles; by others it is attributed to the clergy of the second or third century. No one seems to have noticed the possibility of both theories being correct; that is to say, the probability that the form of church government established by the apostles necessarily unfolded itself into a system of ecclesiastical subordination

under the supremacy of bishops. The common error appears to have been, that too much has been attributed to foresight and design, and too little to the controlling power of circumstances. There can be no doubt that teachers were specially set apart in the churches, as in the Jewish synagogues, from the very beginning; so long as the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost continued there could be no difficulty in determining who were the fittest persons to be entrusted with this charge; but in a subsequent age a system of training and education was necessary to prepare candidates for the clerical office, and when heresies began to increase, it was further necessary to adopt precautions against the teaching of unsound doctrine.

The distinction between the clergy and laity was more widely drawn as the increasing number of converts rendered the ministration of the offices more important and more onerous. Baptism, for instance, which gave admission to the Christian church, was only administered to those converts who had been examined and found worthy of participation in such a rite; and the Christian church could not long have existed, if the duty of instituting such an examination had been entrusted to the caprice of every member of the congregation, and not confined to responsible ministers.

It may be true, that originally there was little or no distinction between the bishop and the presbyter, or that the bishop was only the chief in the body of presbyters; but there can be no doubt that the extension of this authority was rendered necessary for the maintenance of good order in the Church, and unity

amongst Christians. "When," says St. Jerome, "every one regarded those he baptized as belonging to himself rather than to Jesus Christ, it was everywhere decreed that one person, elected from the presbyteries, should be placed over the others, to whom the care of the whole Church might belong, and thus the seeds of division might be taken away*." During the struggle against paganism, such an institution was the more necessary, as the Roman government was particularly jealous of anything like associations formed by its subjects; and, consequently, any attempt to rule the Church continually by congregations or presbyteries, would have been utterly impracticable. Thus regarded, the truth would seem to be, that a principle of subordination begun and recognised in the time of the apostles, was extended into the form of episcopacy by the early Church, and that this form was not deliberately adopted in preference to others, but was suggested by its own expediency.

We have already seen that during the ages of persecution the office of bishop was not likely to be sought from motives of worldly ambition; the acceptance of it was often known to be a voluntary exposure to persecution, suffering, and death. In more peaceful times, the care of the churches, though not perilous, was still burdensome, for the Christians, reluctant to go before pagan tribunals, referred most of their civil disputes to the adjudication of their spiritual guides. The bishops also superintended the

* ST. HIERON. *Comment. in Tit. I.*

administration of the funds collected for charitable purposes, and though this may have increased their influence over their flocks, it involved much labour and responsibility, especially as the majority of converts belonged to the poorer classes of society. That distinctive character of Christianity, "to the poor the Gospel is preached," must never be left out of sight; poverty, overlooked by the pagan priest, and despised by the pagan philosopher, was an object of special care to the Christian bishop.

The bishops and clergy possessed great authority in the Christian community at the time of the accession of Caracalla; but it had not been acquired by any unfair or improper means, it had been dearly earned. Power is not always retained by the same arts which led to its acquisition; even those by whom it is most beneficially wielded, are anxious to secure for their influence a more permanent basis than expediency or utility. But this is not entirely their own fault; those who are subject to a beneficent rule, and derive from it advantages which are felt in every portion of their lives, are naturally reluctant to have such an administration endangered even by themselves, and they therefore invest the origin of that rule with a mysterious sanctity, so as to represent resistance to it as sinful. In religion, men have always been "averse to take trouble in the investigation of truth, and willing rather to acquiesce in what is ready decided for them*." The laity were more eager to force autho-

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, Third Series, 197.

city upon the clergy, than the clergy to usurp it; but, from whatever cause it may have originated, there can be no doubt that early in the third century a hierarchical system was fully developed, in which the clerical body had obtained extensive authority, and to a considerable extent had interests separate from the laity.

The assembling of provincial councils, in which the bishop of the chief city of the province presided, tended greatly to strengthen the hierarchical system. The presiding bishop began to claim precedence and honour as a metropolitan, and thence gradually to assert authority over the rest of his brethren. The bishops again became less and less controlled by their presbyteries, and the clergy looked to the councils for guidance and direction, and were thus removed from the control of the laity. This change was not the result of plan or design; it arose from the circumstances in which the Christian churches were placed, and ecclesiastical law only confirmed what previous custom had established.

It is certain that presbyters and deacons were admitted to a share in the early councils; but it is a controverted question whether laymen took any share in these deliberations. The probability is that there was at first no fixed rule on the subject; until the age of persecution was over, no person would have been ambitious of taking an active part in the government of the Church, except he was called to do so by his official duties. Few laymen would consequently attend, and those few would naturally leave the discus-

sions to the clergy, as being better qualified than themselves to regulate matters of doctrine and discipline. The usage long continued acquired the force of a law, and was further recommended by expediency, when councils became so extensive as to render a limitation in the number of the members very desirable, if not absolutely necessary.

From the custom of holding councils, and from the communication of the regulations adopted in one church to the rulers of another, the doctrine of "the Catholic church," as one body, necessary arose. It was introduced after the rise and spread of sects which maintained peculiar opinions, and separated themselves from the general body. This was a necessary result of the increasing importance of Christianity, and though its direct tendency was obviously good, inasmuch as it furnished an easy test for distinguishing between the doctrines and practices of the Christian church, and the novelties which had at various times been introduced to sully the purity of the Christian faith, it nevertheless led to an undue reliance on human authority, fraught with serious evils in a future age.

We have now gone through the history of the first struggle between true religion and pagan idolatry; we have seen Christianity, in spite of persecutions and temptations, win its way from weakness to strength, and from obscurity to power. But a second contest still remained, heathenism had still sufficient power left to make an effort for recovering its supremacy;

but it had now to contend against one powerful and organized body, instead of a few obscure and isolated communities; the circumstances of both were changed, and the final issue might have been easily anticipated.

CHAPTER XII.

EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES THAT LED TO
THE GREAT EXTENSION OF CHRISTIANITY.

LITTLE more than a century had elapsed since Christianity had emancipated itself from the trammels of Judaism, and proclaimed itself a dispensation addressed to all the nations of the world. In that short space of time, it had risen from being the doctrine of an obscure and oppressed sect to be the creed of extensive churches and powerful communities; it had grown up in spite of the imperial majesty of Rome, and more than rivalled any of the established religions of the earth. It had won its way noiselessly and without violence; its votaries were distinguished, not by their actions, but by their sufferings; and every one of their victories was marked by circumstances which in any other cause would have been signs of defeat. Its success, therefore, must have been owing to the inherent strength of its evidence, and to the providential superintendence of its Author. So obvious is this conclusion, that the opponents of Christianity have ever confessed that the history of its early progress is one of the most cogent arguments for its truth, and they have therefore exercised their ingenuity to discover certain auxiliaries to which some portion of this undeniable success might be attributed. The consideration of these pretended auxiliaries comes naturally before us at the close of the period in which

Christianity won its way without any external aid; and we shall therefore proceed to inquire how far the five secondary causes assigned by Gibbon for the wondrous success of the Christian faith were auxiliaries independent of Christianity, and how far they can in any way be regarded as weakening the evidence which such diffusion affords for the divine origin of the religion. Such an inquiry is a necessary part of history; for it is not sufficient to record results without an examination of the causes by which they were produced.

The first cause assigned by the sceptic is,—“The inflexible, and if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses*.”

In stating a cause, it is not fair to introduce an inference as indisputable, which no person acquainted with the facts of the case would concede for an instant. It is *not* true that the Christian zeal was derived from the Jewish religion, for it was opposed to its very essence. Exclusiveness was and is the first principle of Judaism; the zeal which it nurtured, sought not merely to procure benefits for a single people, but to

* The fallacies in these five causes have been already exposed in the *Natural History of Society* (ii., 183—191); but as they were there examined in their relation to civilization rather than Christianity, it has been thought necessary to investigate them in their bearings on Christian evidence.

exclude every body else from any participation in them. The zeal of the Christian was displayed in extending to men of every country, caste, or colour, the same blessings and privileges which had been bestowed upon himself; consequently, it could no more have been derived from Judaism than light from darkness. It would be just as reasonable to call day a purification of night, as to say that Judaism, purified from its "narrow and unsocial spirit," would produce the zeal of a true Christian. We have seen in a preceding chapter that they were directly opposed to each other, and that it was the abhorrence of Christianity to the sectarian spirit of Judaism which brought down the first storm of persecution on the Christian church in Jerusalem.

Jews and Christians indeed agreed in regarding their own religion not only as true, but as exclusively true. It was the declaration of the apostolic missionary, that "there was no other name given under heaven whereby men could be saved but that of Christ Jesus." But this exclusiveness of faith is a very different thing from intolerance of zeal; and so far is it from being a probable element of success, that nothing can be conceived more disadvantageous to the extension of a principle than the declaration that its establishment involves the total destruction of all the other principles which had previously guided both faith and action. If a physician were to propose a new remedy for a disease, which not only superseded the preceding remedy, but required a complete revolution in the entire system of medical practice, and a total abandon-

ment of every existing rule and custom which had been employed in the treatment of disease, no one would doubt that the universal adoption of such a specific could only result from the most decisive experience of its efficiency. It would be so obviously the interest of all the old practitioners to expose every instance of its failure, that, we may be assured, they would be constantly on the watch to find out any thing that might be tortured into a proof of its fruitless application. They would feel, with the silversmith of Ephesus, "we know that by this craft we have our wealth," and they would resist the ruin of their craft to the uttermost. Exclusive faith in Christianity similarly affected all who derived their livelihood from idolatry, and the more powerful band of those who obtained fame and fortune by lecturing on the speculations of the Grecian philosophy.

A second assumption in this pretended cause is, that an "intolerant and inflexible zeal" must have been derived from Judaism. But why could it not have been derived from paganism? "*A setter forth of strange gods*" was regarded as a criminal in every ancient state. It was the charge brought against Socrates in Athens and the bacchanalians in Rome: it was repeatedly forbidden, not merely by augurs and pontiffs, but by decrees of the senate and edicts of the emperor. Foreign gods were nevertheless introduced, for no system of polytheism had sufficient strength to resist the introduction of other systems; the harmony and toleration ascribed to the systems of paganism were forced upon them by irresistible circumstances;

priests and rulers struggled against them, but they struggled in vain. Christian emperors, it is true, overthrew heathen statues, forbade pagan practices, and sometimes inflicted civil penalties on idolaters: but Paulus Æmilius with his own hand wielded a hatchet to overthrow the altars of Isis and Serapis; the Roman senate forbade Lutatius to consult the Prænestine oracles; and Caius Cornelius ordered the Chaldæans to leave Italy within five days, under pain of death*." The successors of Alexander lost the empire of Persia, and drove Judæa into rebellion, by their efforts to force the Grecian system of idolatry on both countries.

Christian zeal is described as "inflexible," but whether inflexibility is to be considered a good or an evil quality depends upon the object to which it is directed. He who pursues noble ends by noble means ought to be inflexible, for every deviation from his course is a change for the worse. But inflexibility is a very different thing from intolerance; it is one thing to follow a steadfast course, but it is quite another thing to force others to adopt the same course. The Christians, indeed, refused to sully themselves with any of the multitudinous rites of paganism, and may, therefore, though not without some abuse of language, be called intolerant of *principles*, but were they intolerant of persons? Far from it; the testimony of their enemies shows them to have been faithful subjects, useful citizens, and bountiful benefactors to the distressed,

* TAYLOR'S *Natural History of Society*, ii., 184.

without making any distinction of religion. The Christians were foremost in relieving the general population of Smyrna when the city was almost destroyed by an earthquake, after the martyrdom of Polycarp.

It would be easy to multiply examples illustrating the difference between the exclusiveness of Christian faith and the intolerance of Christian zeal. But it is of more importance to show that Christians were intolerant, only in the sense in which God is said to be *jealous*; they declared that a penalty was attached to the following of the courses then generally pursued by mankind, but they did not arrogate to themselves the right of inflicting the punishment. Thus viewed, there can be no doubt that Christianity made more converts than it would have done if the apostles had not called upon men *to embrace it at their peril*. But this only amounts to showing that the strong conviction which the Christian teachers had of the truth themselves gave weight and influence to the doctrines they taught. Their pagan rivals wanted the tone of sincerity which arises from strong conviction, and were, therefore, compelled to have recourse to the physical peril of persecution, because their own faith was not sufficiently strong to induce them to rely on any other.

Christian zeal was a quality peculiar to the Christian religion; it differed in essence from that of either Pagan or Jew, for it was not connected with the glory or prosperity of a country, caste, or community, but it sought to promote the happiness of every man individually and of all mankind collectively.

Perhaps the true nature of Christian zeal may be best elucidated by a consideration of the objects against which it is directed. "The innumerable deities and rites of polytheism were closely interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or private life; and it seemed impossible to escape the observance of them, without, at the same time, renouncing the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of society." Deep indeed, then, must have been the convictions which induced men to change the whole course of their lives, even to its minutest circumstances, and truly inflexible must the zeal have been which on every occasion of festivity or mourning compelled the Christian to stand aloof and withhold the full flow of his natural sympathies.

But would the zeal which was limited to an intolerance of idolatrous usages be likely to win converts? It is evident that, on the contrary, it would produce a general inclination to dismiss Christianity without a hearing; the Christians would have stood beyond the pale of society, unable to share in its joys and its sorrows. But this "intolerance" of pagan rites was accompanied by an untiring affection for pagan souls; while the convert abstained from the usages of his pagan friends and relatives, he manifested an intense desire to communicate to them the inestimable blessings which he had himself received. So far, indeed, was Christian zeal from any intolerance of persons, that the martyr offered up prayers for his murderers, and the victim for his executioners. In the midst of chains, and torments, and injuries, his heart's

desire was, "I would to God that not only thou, but all who hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, excepting these bonds*." This is not the character of the zeal described by the sceptical objector; inflexible, indeed, it is, but it is anything rather than intolerant; it bears no trace of a Jewish origin, and it required not to be purified, for it was itself pure as the source from which it flowed.

But it is untrue that "the doctrine of a future life," as stated by the apostles, "was improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to this important truth;" on the contrary, they avoided anything like a circumstantial detail of the joys of paradise, or the future sufferings of the wicked. Had their views of the state of the soul after death been framed for the purpose of giving efficacy to their doctrines, without reference to their truth, they would have given as copious and minute descriptions of futurity as we find in the monkish legends of the Middle Ages. But the eternity preached by the apostles bears no such marks of "a cunningly-devised fable;" it is everywhere set forth as part of a practical system of truths, and nowhere as an independent reason for the adoption of these truths.

"Nothing," says Archbishop Whately, "could have been more interesting to man's curiosity than a full account of a future state; and accordingly the Koran abounds with the most copious and high-wrought descriptions of paradise and hell, and of the details of

* Acts xxvi. 29.

the day of judgment. The writers of our Scripture (and the apostolic teachers), on the contrary, while they are perpetually enforcing with all earnestness the reality of this future state, so important in practice, strictly confine themselves to the most brief and general description of it.

“Again, the principles on which different classes of mankind will be judged, and the future fate of those who never heard of revelation, are a highly interesting subject of inquiry, but one from which Scripture carefully abstains, except as far as is needful for us to know: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*, is our Lord’s answer to those who inquired as to the number of the saved; and he scarcely adverts at all to the case of the unenlightened, except to inculcate the heavier responsibility of those who sin against revealed knowledge, above those who offended merely against the light of natural reason: *The servant who knew his master’s will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes*. All this, as might be expected, is exactly reversed in the Koran, which describes at large the final condemnation of all mankind except Mohammedans; and of these, such as are punished for their sins, so far from being judged more guilty, as having sinned against better knowledge, are described as finally to be restored, by their belief in the prophet, and received into paradise. Such certainly is the revelation, and such the doctrine, which a false teacher would naturally deliver*.”

* WHATELY’S *Essays*, First Series, 243-4.

The first of the auxiliary causes assigned by the sceptic for the early success of Christianity must be set aside, because zeal, such as he describes, did not exist among Christians, and because the zeal which did exist, instead of being an auxiliary, was a necessary part of the religion itself.

The second cause stated by the sceptic is, "the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to this important truth." But this cause, so far from being an auxiliary independent of Christianity, is one of its most striking peculiarities. "The belief of a life to come, though nominally professed, cannot be considered as practically forming any part of the creed of those ancient nations with which we are best acquainted. Cicero acknowledges, that the epistle of Sulpitia to him on the death of Tullia, comprehended every argument for comfort which the case admitted; yet we find in it no allusion to the one topic, which would have been uppermost in the mind of a believer, It is no wonder, therefore, that when at Athens, Paul came to speak of the resurrection of the dead, some of his hearers mocked; and that, when Festus 'heard of the resurrection from the dead,' he exclaimed, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself.' So far indeed were the promulgators of Christianity from finding the belief of a future state already well established, that they appear to have had no small difficulty in convincing of this truth, even some of their converts. Some of those who denied a *resurrection* may indeed with good reason be supposed to have looked for some other

kind of future existence; but when Paul finds it necessary to urge, ‘*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable — let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,*’ it is plain that he must have been opposing such as expected *nothing* beyond the grave. And when he exhorts the Thessalonians not to sorrow for the deceased, ‘even as the *rest* who have *no hope,*’ we have the testimony if we will receive it, of one who knew better than we can, as to the real sentiment of the heathens upon this point*.”

But it may be said that though the vulgar heathen had no belief in a future life, yet that it was a tenet received and taught by many eminent philosophers. Undoubtedly many ancient philosophers have written in favour of the theory of a future state, but rather as a speculation than a doctrine; they assigned no sufficient evidence for its truth†, and they deduced no practical rules from its existence.

The Christian doctrine of a future state was not, therefore, as the sceptic insinuates, “a doctrine improved by additional circumstances;” it was a doctrine peculiar to Christianity, and resting wholly on Christian evidence. The doctrine, as it was taught by the apostles, was identical with the doctrine of the resurrection, and the fact of Christ’s resurrection was both its foundation and its proof. St. Paul declares to the Corinthians‡, “If Christ be not raised up, your faith

* WHATELY’S *Essays*, First Series, 41. † Ibid., 48—51.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 17.

is vain." This is not an "additional circumstance improving a doctrine,"—it is *the fact* in which the doctrine originated, and by which alone it can be maintained.

But this is not the only misrepresentation of the Christian doctrine in which sceptics have indulged. It has pleased Gibbon to state the doctrine in a form which omits, or rather disguises, the principle that gives it life and efficacy. He says, "When the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind, on condition of *adopting the faith*, and of *observing the precepts* of the Gospel, it is no wonder that such an *advantageous* offer should have been accepted by great numbers of every rank and every province in the Roman Empire." The fallacy in this assertion rests in the use of the word *advantageous*; in a spiritual sense, no greater advantages could be offered to mankind than those which the Gospel presented; but it is false to insinuate that they were offered on such easy conditions, as to appear advantageous in a temporal point of view. The faith required was not a speculative belief, the obedience required was not a compliance with conditions to be effected by some means once and for ever. The conditions required, were personal conviction, displaying its sincerity in action, personal holiness, purity of soul, extending through the whole career of life, and requiring perpetual vigilance for their full performance. Neither did Christianity teach that the performance of these conditions gave men a right to immortal bliss; it declares that, though dependent on obedience, it is "earned and merited only by

the sacrifice of a Redeemer*.” “The *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

An immortality to be obtained only by the sacrifice of every old habit, association, and prejudice; which shut man out from every public festival and private entertainment, which prevented his exercising any trade that was in the least concerned in the framing or adorning of idols, which exposed the believer every hour to reproaches from friends, insults from neighbours, persecution from the multitude, and martyrdom from the magistrates, could neither be deemed advantageous, nor rendered acceptable, except by the strength of evidence on which it was propounded. That evidence was the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, any success which Christianity derived from its offering an immortality of bliss, was owing to its own inherent doctrines, to the fact that “Christ is risen indeed.”

“The views,” says Archbishop Whately, “which the sacred writers give of the rewards prepared for the faithful in the next life, (dim and imperfect as they are,) correspond in the most natural and striking manner with their mode of inculcating Christian duty. And those persons whose topics of exhortation on this latter point are exclusively addressed to the head, and not to the heart, labour under a corresponding defect in their manner of speaking of future happiness; their views of which, accordingly, are, as well as their moral precepts, needlessly dry, unattractive, and uninter-

* WHATELY'S *Essays*, First Series, 102.

esting to the feelings. They keep out of sight throughout, the *personal* character of our religion, and of every thing connected with it: *i. e.*, its continual reference to *persons*, and especially to that Great Person who is the Author of it, rather than to mere abstract *things*. While they dwell in delineating and enforcing duty, exclusively on the excellence and advantage of a virtuous life—of obeying the dictates of a well-regulated conscience, of walking in the path of moral rectitude, and the like—they speak also in a corresponding tone of the infinite value of an eternity of happiness; of being freed from the evils and imperfections of our present state; of escaping the horrors of endless remorse; and of being exalted into a new and superior condition; with much of the same kind, that is perfectly true indeed, and deserving of being kept in mind, but which is far less *interesting* (when such topics are dwelt on exclusively) than the continual reference to *persons*, which we find in the sacred writers.

“As Paul’s favourite exhortations (if I may so speak) to personal holiness, whether he is directing our views to future reward, or to the other incentive just mentioned, consist in a reference, of some sort or other, to Jesus Christ; so, his allusions to that reward itself are of a corresponding character. On the one hand, in the inculcation of virtue, he dwells, as has been just remarked, on the example Jesus left us, that ‘we should walk in his steps;’ he speaks of ‘walking in love, as Christ also hath loved us;’—of ‘putting on Christ;’—of being ‘buried *with Him* in

baptism;—of being ‘risen with Christ;’—of doing ‘what is well pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ;—of our being ‘followers of him (Paul) even as he is of Christ;’ and the like: not speaking so often of *Christian virtue* in the abstract, as he does of it embodied, as it were, exemplified, represented, *personified*, in Jesus Christ; ‘*looking unto Jesus*, the Author and finisher of our faith,’ at every step. And on the other hand, his language in speaking of the Christian’s *hopes*, corresponds with that concerning Christian *duties*: he does not speak so much of eternal happiness *in the abstract*, as of the happiness of an intimate union with our great Master; to die is, with him, to ‘depart and *to be with Christ*,’ after ‘having suffered with Him, to reign also *with Him*,’ of ‘the crown of glory, which He, the righteous Lord, has prepared for all that *love his appearing*,’ and his encouragement to the Colossians is, ‘So shall we ever be *with the Lord*.’ And this tone is the more remarkable in the expressions of Paul, from the circumstance that he was not, like the other apostles, personally acquainted with Jesus while on earth.¹

“Thus also the Evangelist John (as well befitted the beloved disciple) places both all Christian perfection in conformity to the pattern, and all happiness and glory in admission to the presence, of our great Master; ‘We know not what we shall be; but we know, that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’ And our Lord’s own language is of the same tone: as the motive He seeks to implant in the disciples’ breast is, as has been

said, love, gratitude, and reverence for Himself, so the encouragement He 'sets before them, is the hope, not merely of happiness in the abstract, but of intimate union and close intercourse with Himself: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' 'If a man love me he will keep my saying, and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him*, and make our abode with him.' 'I will not leave you comfortless; I will *come unto you*.' 'That *where I am*, there ye may be also,' &c.

"All this is admirably suited both to what man *is*, and to what he *ought* to be. As emulation is a natural principle, and a good example accordingly is more instructive and more impressive than the best general maxims, so, the thought, whom we are *to live with*—for what sort of *society* we are to fit ourselves, affects the mind much more strongly than any general description of what that life itself shall be. That the chief part of the happiness therefore which is prepared for the faithful in a better world, is to consist in a more perfect knowledge of our Redeemer, and closer intercourse with him, serves on the one hand to interest, and encourage, and delight the right-minded Christian, and to admonish, and warn, and improve, one who is not such. This world being, as we are taught, not merely a state of *trial*, but also of *preparation*, no precepts can be so advantageous to us with this view, as to be told what sort of society it is *for which* we are required to prepare ourselves. No general rules, however copious and precise, can equal the combined effect of the example of a particular *person* set before us, together with a notice that for

his society we are required to endeavour to qualify ourselves. And accordingly John adds, immediately after the passage just cited, ‘Every one that hath *this hope* in him, purifieth himself even *as HE is pure.*’”

The third cause mentioned by Gibbon, is “the miraculous powers ascribed to the early Christian church.” But if the mere ascription of miraculous powers to any person or body would suffice to produce the effects which the historian enumerates, the followers of Simon Magus, of Apollonius Tyaneus, of the Jewish exorcists, and the Roman sorcerers, would have possessed more influence than we know they ever attained. The miracles wrought by our Lord and his apostles were not mere attestations of their authority,—they were addressed to the heart as well as the understanding, and conveyed a moral lesson in addition to an evidence. When miracles were demanded as mere proofs, they were invariably refused;—“A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after the sign, but no sign shall be given them save that of the prophet Jonah,”—and the converts made by witnessing the miracle of the loaves and fishes, “went back and walked no more” with Jesus, when they found that there was instruction in the sign which they were unwilling to receive. A miracle may compel the assent of the understanding; but there must be something more than a mere display of supernatural power to win the feelings, the affections, and the heart. It was not the earthquake which liberated Paul and Silas that converted the jailor at Philippi; it was the

fortitude with which the prisoners remained after the doors were thrown open, and the prompt benevolence of Paul in preventing the keeper from doing himself any harm.

It was the general belief of the Jews that the certain sign, the only decisive attestation of the Messiah, would be his "coming in the clouds of heaven," as they interpreted the declaration of the Prophet Daniel. Hence their constant demand, "Show us *the* sign from heaven." No such mere attestation of power was vouchsafed to them, for they had already sufficient evidence before them to establish the truth of our Lord's mission, and the special sign which they demanded, so far from having a moral effect, would have tended to strengthen their inveterate error respecting the temporal character of Christ's kingdom. Miracles were certainly among the proofs of the divine origin of Christianity; but they were only a part of the evidence on which it was founded. And again, every miracle was not merely a proof of Christ's doctrine; but an extension and application of it. Hence we find that the signs to which our Lord appealed as attestations of his mission, were of a very different nature. "Go and show John again those things which ye hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." In these miracles "he not only proved his authority, and exercised his compassion; but suggested the inference, that he had come to restore our lost nature to its original purity, to enlighten the ignorant, as all men were, and

to enable us to stand in the path of life, when without him we could not but fail and sink*.”

The success of Christianity cannot, therefore, be ascribed to the miracles regarded merely as signs and wonders; it was owing rather to their moral influence, to the proofs they afforded of the benevolent purpose for which the religion was promulgated. In some of the apostolic miracles this purpose is not so apparent, but in each of them we can trace a symbolic meaning, more or less distinct, going beyond the mere manifestation of power; as it were, embodying the doctrine, besides affording proof of its truth. Hence the belief in them did not merely extort assent to doctrine taught, but it made that doctrine influential on life and practice. The third cause, then, assigned by the sceptic is, as he states it, insufficient to account for the effect produced; and, as it ought to be stated, instead of being an auxiliary to Christianity, it forms part of its very essence.

The fourth cause by which the sceptic has endeavoured to account for the great success of Christianity, is “the pure and austere morals of the Christians.” Two very different things are here classed together,—purity and austerity; the former of which was, no doubt, an attribute of the Christian religion, while the latter was directly condemned, both by Christ and his apostles. But if the fruits of Christianity were holiness of life and purity of morals, no stronger proof could be adduced of the excellence of its principles.

* HINDS' *Christianity*, i., 95.

Men do not gather "figs from thorns, nor grapes from thistles." To evade the force of this obvious reasoning, Gibbon says, "The Christians allured into their party the most atrocious criminals, who, as soon as they were touched by a sense of remorse, were easily persuaded to wash away, in the waters of baptism, the guilt of their past conduct, for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation." Now it is not true that the Christians allured "atrocious criminals;" all the early converts whom we are able to trace by name appear far above the moral average of their Jewish and Pagan brethren: it is not true that baptism was ever represented as a complete expiatory rite, which would of itself "wash away the guilt of past conduct;" and it is not true that expiation for atrocious crimes would be refused in the heathen temples. The early apologists for Christianity justly dwell on the great reformation of manners produced by the adoption of the new religion, but they never assert that the persons thus reformed were originally worse than the rest of the heathen who surrounded them; on the contrary, they directly assert that the vices which those converts abandoned were the ordinary habits of the heathens*. That several persons of profligate lives were withdrawn from the power of sin and Satan by divine grace through the preaching of the Gospel, is undoubtedly true; but it is not true that such persons formed the majority or even a large proportion of the Christian converts, and there is no

* St. Paul, Romans i. 24—32.

evidence that they were conspicuous for superior purity of life. Indeed, the inference which the historian deduces as an incontrovertible truth, appears to be contradicted by all experience. He says, "As these criminals emerged from sin and superstition to the glorious hope of immortality, they resolved to devote themselves to a life, not only of virtue, but of penitence. The desire of perfection became the ruling passion of their souls; and it is well known that while reason embraces a cold mediocrity, our passions hurry us with rapid violence over the space which lies between the most opposite extremes." There can be no doubt that atrocious criminals, terrified by the expected approach of death and judgment, may be led to contemplate their past lives with remorse and sorrow; but the instances are, unfortunately, rare, of such persons persevering in a new life when the circumstances which forced attention to their perilous situation have passed away. Besides, Christianity requires far more than a change of outward conduct; it enjoins new motives, new principles of action, a new creation of the inner man. It was not enough for the actions to be correct; the heart should be purified with its affections and lusts; "the desire of perfection" was not so much the "the ruling passion of the soul," as a new principle wrought into the convert's consciousness, and forming part of his personal and individual life.

Apparently Gibbon felt the weakness of his own reasoning, for he assigns a very different reason for the continued morality of the Christian converts in a sub-

sequent paragraph. He ascribes it to their zeal for the reputation of their limited sect. If this had been an influential motive, we should certainly have found it prominent in the exhortations of the apostles, in their epistles to the churches, and in the writings of the early fathers. There could be no reason for their disguising it, because such a motive is not only innocent, but laudable. Yet we rarely find the Christians exhorted to make their conduct creditable to the Church, but "to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto his kingdom and glory." Indeed, St. Paul, in the most emphatic terms, separates his exhortations to personal holiness from any thing like pride of sect or party: "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another."

The purity of the Christians was derived from the purity of Christianity; it was, and it still is, the necessary result of that religion when it is embraced with the whole heart and soul and strength. In such a manner only could it be embraced when its profession exposed those by whom it was adopted to dishonour, danger, and death. We, who live in an age when it is too common to see nominal Christians walking unworthy of their high vocation and profession, are scarcely able to appreciate the almost universal purity of the early Christian church; we do not sufficiently estimate the strength of faith required to join and continue in a persecuted community; but if we could once comprehend the strength of principle required in the early Church, we should no longer be surprised at

finding such principle influencing the entire of a Christian's life and conduct.

From what we have said, it appears that the rectitude of Christian conduct was derived from the purity of Christian principle; it had its source within the religion, and was in no way indebted to any external cause. But this purity was not "austerity." Austere practices were among the earliest corruptions of Christianity, and, unfortunately, there is reason to fear that they will be among the latest. But in the period of church history through which we have gone,—the interval between the first preaching of the Gospel and the time when the Christian church became an organized and numerous community,—these errors were infrequent, and austerities were discountenanced by nearly the entire body of bishops and clergy. To understand from what causes Christianity prevailed over paganism, we must study the circumstances of the contest only during the period when Christianity alone and unaided maintained the struggle. We shall unfortunately see, that when the Christians subsequently were aided by worldly advantages, their conduct was too often influenced by worldly motives.

The last of the five causes which we have to examine is, "The union and discipline of the Christian church, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire." The remark which we have just made, that we must view the contest between Paganism and Christianity, when the latter had nothing on which it could rely but its inherent truth, is still more applicable here. It

was not until a very late period in the struggle, that Christianity assumed the form of a system, and that the Christian churches became regularly organized bodies. Indeed, we have shown that it was the great success of Christianity which led to the organization, instead of the organization being the source of the success. In the early stages of the Gospel, no provision was made for uniformity of worship or discipline, or for any system which might hold all Christians together as one sect or party. The churches were founded independently, and governed independently, long before they became a federative republic; and their federation was long continued, on terms of mutual equality, before a claim was made to precedence by any. The difficulty which the sceptic has to solve is, "how the Christian church acquired so much strength as to form an independent state?" It is rather novel to exhibit the *final sign* as the *first cause* of its success; for the Church could not be said to exist as a state until its numbers were multiplied, and until they were held together by some supreme authority or legislative assembly.

We have now shown that the causes of the success of Christianity brought forward by the sceptic, are either historically false or inadequate to the effect produced, and that its triumph was owing to its convincing evidence, its inherent truth, and its obvious effects on life and conduct. But it is not intended to deny that the progress of the Gospel was materially aided by external causes; the overruling providence of its great Author in ordering the affairs of the earth, so as to

make a way for its reception, is manifest in every page of early history. But its chief external assistance arose from the growing weakness of heathenism: the pagan system was worn out, the time was gone when its legends, and marvels, and oracles claimed implicit homage; men, when they thought at all on religion, felt that there was a want which neither the superstitions of the vulgar nor the wisdom of the philosopher could supply, and a positive satisfactory creed was, though unconsciously, "the desire of all nations." Thus the most influential external cause of the success of Christianity was also that of its revelation: "The fulness of the time was come."

CHAPTER XIII.

FINAL CONTEST BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND
PAGANISM.

WHILE the tranquillity of the Christian community remained long undisturbed during the various political revolutions that followed the murder of Caracalla, the pagan religion of Rome received a severe blow from an unexpected quarter; it was opposed, and for a season vanquished, by a rival heathen creed. The Roman army in the East chose for an emperor a youth only fourteen years of age, who had been educated as a priest of the Sun, in a Syrian temple, and who took the name of Elagabalus, the eastern appellation of the deity to whose service he had been attached. The new emperor resolved to introduce the worship of the Syrian deity into Rome, with all the cruel and licentious rites that have ever degraded eastern idolatry. The conical black stone which was adored at Emesa as the type of the productive powers of solar heat was brought in solemn procession to Rome, a magnificent temple was erected for its reception on the Palatine Hill, and the altars of the ancient gods were plundered to decorate those of the new divinity. The sacrifices offered to the symbol were of the most superb kind,—“hecatombs of oxen, countless sheep, the most costly aromatics, the choicest wines were offered; streams of blood and wine were constantly flowing down; while the highest dignitaries of

the empire—commanders of legions, rulers of provinces, the gravest senators, appeared as humble ministers, clad in the loose and flowing robes and linen sandals of the East, among the lascivious dances and the wanton music of Oriental drums and cymbals.” Those who were reluctant in offering their homage, or who murmured against the innovations were instantly put to death, while the highest offices of the state rewarded the zealous worshippers of the Syrian Elagabalus.

At first the emperor seemed disposed to unite the new religion with the old, and he proclaimed his design of wedding the Syrian god to the tutelary goddess of Rome, to Minerva, whose sacred image, the Palladium, was fabled to have been saved by the ancestors of the Romans from the destruction of Troy. This image, which it had been long deemed sacrilege to expose to the public gaze, was brought forth from its seclusion, solemnly wedded to the black stone of Emesa, and then repudiated, as a consort unworthy of so sublime a divinity. -

This insult to the national religion of Rome and to the object which from the earliest ages of the city had been regarded with the deepest awe and reverence, shook the faith of many, who from mere habit had followed the customs of their fathers; they began to discover the folly of their own system of paganism when they were called upon to choose between it and another. Meantime a more appropriate bride was selected for the Syrian deity; the Phœnician goddess Ashtaroth or Astarte, worshipped in Carthage as the

queen of heaven, was invited to meet her spouse at Rome, and the whole of Italy was commanded to celebrate the bridal festival. It was openly asserted that the worship of Elagabalus and Astarte was to supersede every other religion; the statue or symbol of the Syrian god was annually drawn in triumph through the streets, while the images of the other gods and the ornaments of their temples were exhibited in the procession like the captives and spoil of conquered nations.

The ancient religion of Rome thus publicly deposed from its supremacy could never recover its former authority; it had been insulted, degraded, and dragged in triumph at the chariot-wheel of a conqueror. Some of its votaries might lament its fate, and perhaps hope for its future restoration, but its influence with the mass of the vulgar was for ever destroyed.

The murder of the Syrian emperor prevented the Syrian superstition from becoming the established religion, but his cousin and successor, Alexander Severus, while he abandoned the worship of Elagabalus, was far from returning to the ancient paganism of Rome. He appears, indeed, to have aimed at compiling a religion for himself, from all the various systems existing in his own age; he showed no particular preference for any, and he gave equal privileges to all.

Alexander Severus appears to have been the first emperor who recognised the Christian bishops and clergy in their official character; they appeared at his court and were treated with the same respect as those who held offices in the empire. About this time also,

the Christians began to possess regular places of public worship; they had previously assembled in private houses, in the cemeteries, in secret groves and other sequestered places where they were likely to be secure from the interruption of their malicious enemies; but they were now permitted to exercise their worship in public, and thus to refute the calumnies which had originated in the secrecy and mystery of their secluded meetings. It is probable that the Christians were indebted for some of these favour to the emperor's mother, Mammæa; while in Syria she had obtained information respecting Christianity, she had sought interviews with the celebrated Origen, and though she was not probably converted by his exhortations, she was inspired with respect and reverence for his creed.

In the brief reign of Decius persecution was revived: the decline of the empire was obvious to every body, and Decius, whom his flatterers declared to be descended from the old Decii, who had devoted themselves as sacrifices to the gods for the safety of Rome, was induced to declare himself the avenger of those deities whose altars were now almost abandoned. The fury of the persecution fell upon the dignitaries of the Church; the bishops of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch were murdered, and the churches for two years were afraid to elect successors to these offices. In Alexandria, the populace surpassed the severity of the emperor's edicts in their furious zeal; many Christians were put to death; others, among whom was Origen, were grievously tortured and very narrowly escaped with their lives. But the persecution in Western

Africa inflicted a more serious injury on the Church than suffering and loss of life. A large number of the African Christians purchased safety by sacrificing to the gods, and when the storm of persecution was passed, sought to be received back amongst their brethren. So great was the number of the *Lapsed*, as those who had fallen away were called, that the mode in which they were to be treated became a very perplexing question, and finally gave rise to a dangerous schism. A large party insisted that those who had been guilty of such unworthy compliances should be for ever excluded from Christian communion; but the majority of Christian bishops were of opinion that they might be re-admitted after a long course of penitence and discipline, on their giving proofs of real reformation.

Personal motives had considerable influence in exasperating those who engaged in this dispute. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, had been converted to Christianity late in life, but his exemplary character and his great attainments in Scriptural knowledge induced the great majority of the presbyters in Carthage to elect him bishop of their church, five only voting against him. The new bishop was a rigid disciplinarian, and he formed so high an estimate of the episcopal dignity, that he considered bishops as vicars or representatives of Christ on earth. This unauthorised assumption gave great offence to many of his presbyters, and when he deemed it prudent to withdraw into retirement during the fury of the Decian persecution, Novatus and some others formed a party

against him in the Church. The absence of the bishop caused a difficulty in the admission of those penitents who after falling into idolatry sought to be reconciled to the Church; Novatus and his party received them on such easy terms that apostasy was likely to be regarded as a very venial offence. Cyprian on his return summoned a council of the African bishops and clergy, by whose aid he framed a series of regulations, which avoided the extreme of severity on the one hand and the excess of facility on the other. Novatus and his adherents refusing to adopt these salutary rules were excommunicated.

While the council was still sitting at Carthage, intelligence arrived that the Christians at Rome had so far recovered their courage as to elect Cornelius to the vacant see; but, unfortunately it appeared that Novatus had carried the spirit of insubordination to Italy, and had allied himself to Novatian, who proclaimed himself the rival bishop of Cornelius. The council of Carthage having investigated the circumstances, recognised Cornelius as the lawful bishop, and their decision was confirmed by a council at Rome, in which the proceedings of Novatian were condemned.

The schism of Novatus and Novatian had commenced with over-indulgence; they at once passed into the opposite extreme of rigorous exclusion. "All the more flagrant sins, as well as that of lapsing in the time of persecution, were held by this party to admit of no forgiveness; no repentance on the part of the offender, nor any course of discipline imposed by

the Church, could entitle him to be re-admitted to communion*.”

They made no distinction between the three classes of the lapsed;—the *libellatici*, who purchased certificates of peace from the heathen magistrate; the *sacrificati*, who had worshipped the pagan deities; and the *traditores*, who had delivered up the sacred writings to be destroyed by their persecutors,—all were included in one sweeping sentence of condemnation.

St. Cyprian was aware that his having fled to avoid the Decian persecution, had afforded his enemies an opportunity of describing him as timid and unfaithful, and that this calumny had greatly weakened the efficacy of his protest against Novatian severity. When the next persecution broke forth under Valerian, he refused to fly; he was consequently arrested, and brought before the proconsul's tribunal. At first he was only sentenced to be exiled to a provincial town; but his writings and letters from his place of banishment were so formidable to paganism, that nothing but his life could satisfy his enemies. He was again seized, and after a brief trial, sentenced to be beheaded. His presbyters, his deacons, and his Christian flock, declared their readiness to die with him; they accompanied him to the place of execution, and honoured his remains with a magnificent funeral.

While the firmness and devotion of St. Cyprian showed that the increased power of the bishops was not inconsistent with the maintenance of Christian

* BURTON'S *Christian Church*, chap. xv.

duty, the conduct of another prelate showed the danger of rendering episcopal rank an object of worldly ambition. Paul of Samosata, having been elevated to the metropolitan see of Antioch, converted to his own purposes the contributions of the faithful, and to prevent any resistance from his presbyters, obtained the dignity of a civil magistrate from Odenatus and Zenobia, who had obtained supreme power in the eastern provinces of the empire. The vast wealth which Paul acquired, the luxuries in which he indulged, and the sensualities he permitted to his clergy, excited general indignation among the Christians; and when he began, in addition, to promulgate new and erroneous doctrines, a council was summoned to investigate his conduct.

More than seventy bishops assembled at Antioch; they voted that Paul should be deposed, and another appointed to his office; but the delinquent bishop, supported by the influence of Zenobia, and a large body of his presbytery, defied the decree of the council, and retained possession of his see for more than four years.

The overthrow of Zenobia by Aurelian changed the fate of the East, and the Asiatic bishops resolved to bring the question of Paul's usurpation before the tribunal of the heathen emperor. This unprecedented event affords the strongest proof of the great extension and increasing influence of Christianity, for it shows that the bishops now held an honourable rank, and were treated with respect by the public authorities.

Aurelian received the appeal of the bishops with

all the reverence that such a subject demanded; as a heathen, he could not enter into the discussion of points of the Christian faith; but he referred the matter to the bishops of Italy, as the most impartial and intelligent umpires that could be obtained. They unanimously approved the sentence of the council, and Paul was compelled to quit the see which his conduct had so flagrantly disgraced. But, great as was the advantage of removing an unworthy bishop, it was more than counterbalanced by the establishing of so dangerous a precedent as the right of a heathen emperor to interfere with the internal policy of the Christian church.

Paganism, though defeated, was not yet extinct, and there were symptoms of preparation for a more desperate struggle to recover its lost ascendancy. The more offensive portions of the popular mythology had been quietly abandoned, or explained away by mystical interpretation; the doctrine of the Divine Unity had not only been adopted, but brought prominently forward as a leading tenet of heathenism. Philosophy pretended to extract allegorical wisdom from the fables of the poets, while superstition invented new modes of sacrifice and initiation. As the Christian miracles could not be denied, tales of prodigies and wonders were invented to oppose them, and a ready reception was given to every impostor who professed to gratify the prejudices of the vulgar, by the practice of supernatural arts.

Dioclesian was the author of the last general persecution of the Christians; he was instigated to this

cruelty by his colleague Galerius, but he was himself jealous of the organization of the Christian church, and of the great power possessed by the prelates. In Nicomedia, where the emperor resided, the Christian church, erected on an eminence, towered above the imperial palace, and rivalled it in architectural beauty. This sacred edifice had long excited the envy and indignation of the heathen, and it was therefore destined to feel the first force of their fury. At the earliest dawn it was broken open by the imperial officers; its simple furniture broken to pieces, the copies of the Scripture committed to the flames, and the structure itself levelled with the ground.

The general edict of persecution was issued on the next day, and its affected moderation rendered it in reality more severe than if it had enjoined a general massacre. It was ordained that the churches should be demolished throughout the empire; that the bishops and presbyters should deliver their sacred books to the magistrates, who were commanded, under the severest penalties, to have them publicly and solemnly burned; that all who held secret assemblies for the purposes of religious worship, should be punished with death; and that those who refused to conform to the worship of the national gods, should be deprived of the rights of citizenship. Such penal laws were a more wearying and painful system of persecution than any to which Christianity had yet been exposed; they rendered injustice legal and systematic, they deprived the Christians of all the protection that society affords, and yet compelled them to bear all the burthens it imposes.

A Christian of some rank tore down this edict from the gates of the palace on which it was posted, and at the same time denounced, in no measured terms, the tyranny and impiety which dictated such laws. This offence was regarded as an act of treason, the perpetrator was doomed to be roasted alive by a slow fire; he endured this horrid punishment with the firmness of a martyr, and even those who condemned his imprudence, could not withhold their admiration from his fortitude. Galerius was not yet satisfied; in order to instigate Dioclesian to fresh cruelties, he twice set fire to the palace of Nicomedia, and threw the blame on the Christians. The most fearful tortures were employed to extort confessions from the supposed incendiaries, and the impossibility of obtaining any proof of their guilt was attributed to their obstinacy and desperation in guilt. Fresh edicts of additional severity were issued: those who refused to give up their sacred books were sentenced to death; the governors of provinces were directed to apprehend and imprison all persons of the ecclesiastical order, and the magistrates were directed to use every means of severity at their discretion to reclaim the Christians from their "odious superstition," and induce them to return to the established worship of the gods. Scarcely had these edicts been issued, when Dioclesian was compelled by the menaces of Galerius to abdicate the empire. His health had long been declining, and there is some reason to believe that his mind had given way under the cares and anxieties of empire; thus enfeebled, it is not surprising that he yielded to

the violence of Galerius, and hid the weakness of his intellect and frame in quiet retirement. This persecution which Dioclesian commenced lasted about eight years, and was finally terminated by Galerius, who, in the agonies of painful disease, hoped to turn away the Divine wrath by granting toleration. He died a few days after, and the competition for the empire which followed his death, brought to a decisive issue the struggle between paganism and Christianity.

Maximin, on whom the principal authority devolved after the death of Galerius, continued a partial persecution of the Christians in Egypt and Syria; his hatred of their religion induced him to invade Armenia, which was the first Christian kingdom. This fact, which has been scarcely noticed by ecclesiastical historians, is very remarkable. It appears that, so early as the fourth century, before Constantine had appeared on the stage, Christianity was the established religion of a powerful and independent nation, on the frontiers of the Roman and Persian empires. Maximin was therefore the author of the first religious war recorded in history; it is gratifying to add, that its results brought him nothing but shame and mortification.

Maxentius, who ruled in Italy, was also an enemy to the Christians, and a cruel tyrant to the rest of his subjects. He became jealous of the fame and abilities of young Constantine, who ruled Gaul with the title of Cæsar, and assembled an immense army to crush so dangerous a rival. The father of Constantine, Constantius Chlorus, had protected the Christians in the provinces under his control during the period of gene-

ral persecution, and hence all of that religion in the western provinces were anxious for the success of his son. Constantine himself must have been acquainted with many Christian ministers, and had probably often listened to their instructions. The approach of Maxentius, who boasted himself to be the chosen champion of the gods of Rome, would naturally lead his mind to examine the value of such a pretension; and if he consulted any of the Christians in his army, they would probably use such arguments as the following, which we know from history to have been most commonly urged at the time.

They would have told him that amongst the former emperors, those who had placed their confidence in the multitudinous deities of polytheism, and endeavoured to conciliate their favour, not only by sacrifices and offerings, but by the blood and sufferings of Christian victims, had received no other recompense than deceptive oracles and a miserable death; that they had disappeared from the earth without leaving any posterity or trace of their existence; that Severus and Galerius, supported by so many soldiers, and so many gods, had closed their career against Maxentius in death and disgrace; that his father alone, the protector of the Christians, had closed a glorious life by a tranquil death in the midst of his family and friends; and that the God of Hosts had ever given victory to his chosen people, so long as they were faithful to his laws.

As such representations as these were common amongst the Christians of that age, there is every

probability that they may have reached the ears of Constantine, and he would be the more inclined to pay them attention, from the fact that his rival's cause was completely identified with Roman polytheism. The idolatry of pagan Rome was a political, rather than a religious creed; its chief object was to maintain the city of Rome as the metropolis of the Roman empire, and the power of the Roman aristocracy as the preponderating body in the state. Maxentius was not merely the champion of paganism as a religion; he was infinitely more the supporter of the religious sanctions which polytheism afforded to the ascendancy of the Roman citizens, and more especially of the Roman senate. On the other hand, Constantine's claims to empire were maintained by those who denied that the constitutional right of election to the empire was exclusively vested in the Roman senate. It is of some importance to bear this political question in view, because we have now reached the period when Christianity was about to receive the sanction of law, and eventually to become the established religion of the Roman empire.

While it is, on the one hand, impossible to deny that Christians individually were benefited by the protection and patronage which Constantine and his successors granted to the churches, it must, on the other hand, be clearly understood that neither Christianity itself, nor the Christian Church, viewed as a religious community, gained any important advantages from imperial favour. The functions of the primitive Church, which were equally performed in the age of

persecution and in the age of protection, had no relation to the governing powers of the state.

From the first formation of a Christian society at Jerusalem, the functions of the Christian community, viewed collectively, were,—to preserve the sacred record of the Gospel;—to perpetuate its evidence;—to dispense its truths;—to convey its promised grace;—and lastly, to preserve itself as the temple of divine manifestation, and the holy of holies, where the blessed gift had been deposited. These were the duties, not merely of the apostles and other appointed teachers, but of all Christians collectively; indeed, it was not until the age of St. Cyprian, that the evil of restricting the meaning of the word “Church” to the clerical body arose; all preceding writers understood by that term the congregation as well as the pastor. St. Cyprian’s restriction of the term was caused by a controversy which referred exclusively to the conduct of the ministers of religion. From the double sense in which the term began to be used after the age of Cyprian, much mistake and confusion have arisen; but we must never forget that this confusion does not belong to the primitive age of Christianity, when the term “Church” always implied the entire Christian community.

In the age of Constantine, the Church in its widest sense was prominently opposed to Roman polytheism, and consequently to the political system with which that polytheism was completely identified. Many of the pagans were just as hostile to that political system, and none more so than Dioclesian, the most virulent

persecutor of the Christians. Rome was attacked in its metropolitan character by two distinct enemies,—the military emperors who attacked its political power, and the Christians who assailed its idolatrous worship. Both parties soon discovered that the political supremacy claimed by the Roman aristocracy was supported chiefly by idolatrous institutions, and hence the alliance between Christianity and the imperial power was predetermined by circumstances beyond the reach of individual control. Independent of the efforts of man, the silent measures of co-operating Providence are too important and too manifest to escape notice. Polytheism, by the silent course of events, was attacked not merely in its faith but in its institutions; it was held up to the world not merely as a bad religion, but as a bad system of civil government, and it was unable to withstand the double scrutiny of the preacher and the politician.

“Every one who has read the writings of the Fathers of the third and fourth centuries, must be aware that the Latin Christians regarded Rome and the aristocratic system associated with that city, as the capital enemies of Christianity. Without entering into any of the controversies which have arisen respecting the interpretation of the Apocalypse, it is an indisputable fact that the early Christians applied all that St. John says of the mystic Babylon to pagan Rome*.” When Constantine therefore took the field against the Roman aristocracy, he found all the Chris-

* *Revolutions, &c., of Europe*, vol. i., p. 25.

tians throughout the empire ready to engage in his cause.

Few subjects have more frequently engaged controversial pens than what is called the miraculous conversion of Constantine; but without entering into any examination of the very weak evidence on which the legend rests, it is sufficient to state that the conversion of Constantine did not take place until more than twenty years after the date of the pretended miracle. We must regard the emperor rather as an instrument in the hand of Providence to effect certain great political changes which opened a way for the more rapid progress and speedy triumph of Christianity, than as its benefactor. His adoption of the *Labarum*, or sacred standard on which the figure of a cross was represented, may be ascribed to political rather than religious motives, for the idolatrous symbols previously displayed on the imperial banners had a reference to the metropolitan ascendancy of the city of Rome, which it was the emperor's great aim to destroy. Such certainly was the view taken of his conduct by the Romans themselves; he was disliked by all the citizens, whether Christians or pagans, as the capital enemy of their political ascendancy. In fact, Constantine occupied nearly the same position in relation to Christianity that Henry VIII. did in relation to the Reformation; the passions of both were enlisted against paganism and popery, without the one becoming a Christian or the other a Protestant.

Constantine, though yet unbaptized, evinced his

gratitude for the victories he obtained under the banner of the cross, by delivering the Christians from persecution and permitting them to share on equal terms in the administration of the empire. It has been asserted by some ecclesiastical historians, anxious to shelter the bigotry and intolerance of their own age under the authority of his great name, that he issued penal laws against the pagans, and retaliated the injuries they had inflicted upon the Christians. Far from adopting any such sanguinary and impolitic course, he adopted the most conciliating and prudent measures.

Existing inscriptions prove that the heathen temples throughout Italy continued open during his reign, and even to the age of Theodosius the Great; that the heathen pontiffs retained their titles, dignities, and offices; that sacrifices continued to be offered, and festivals celebrated by all who pleased. Constantine, and his successors to the time of Gratian, accepted the ensigns and dignity of the office of supreme pontiff offered to them by the pagan priests; they did not, indeed, take any share in their idolatrous ceremonies, but they in some degree seemed to afford them a sanction. It may be a question whether this political complaisance was not sometimes carried too far; but it was certainly better than the opposite extreme of persecution.

Penal laws against paganism would have produced obstinacy and hatred of Christianity; Constantine's wiser policy presented it to his subjects as a religion of love. His example, his favour, and his moderation,

made more converts to Christianity than all the cruelties of his pagan predecessors had produced renegades. Men became insensibly ashamed of deities which they made with their own hands; Christianity penetrated into the senate, which had been long the stronghold of paganism; Anicius, the most illustrious of the body, was the first who proclaimed himself a convert, and his example was followed by many other distinguished patricians.

It was the great object of the emperor's policy to remedy all the evils which could be cured without inflicting fresh wounds. He recalled the exiles; he collected the remains of the martyrs, and caused them to be decently interred. The respect which he showed to the ministers of religion raised the importance of Christianity in the eyes of the people. He treated the bishops with marked honour, made them the companions of his travels, and honoured guests at his table. Nor was his favour to the prelates diminished by the simplicity of their appearance, or the poverty in which most of them then lived. Few, very few bishops could boast of the wealth and dignity of Paul of Samosata; in Italy, and particularly in Rome, they had hitherto been persecuted, and forced to live in concealment, possessing, indeed, heavenly riches, but subjected to temporal sufferings. Constantine presented to the bishop of Rome a palace which had once belonged to Plautius Lateranus, one of the victims of Nero; and in its neighbourhood he erected a basilica, or church, which now bears the name of the Lateran. This was his only donation to the see of Rome; though

the impudent forgery of a later age declared that he conferred on the popes the sovereignty of Rome, Italy, and the Western Empire.

A large portion of Constantine's revenues was expended in the building and repair of churches. In addition to several erected in Rome, he founded many at Ostia, Capua, and Naples, adorned them with valuable offerings, and endowed them with lands for their support. To the churches of Africa, which had suffered most in the recent persecutions, he sent a large sum of money, and declared that a further supply should be forwarded if necessary. At the same time, he issued an edict exempting the clergy from all municipal functions and their churches from taxation; but he excepted heretics and schismatics from the benefit of these edicts,—a circumstance which subsequently produced serious troubles in the Christian community.

The death of Maximin left Christianity without an enemy. Churches were raised in every city; divine worship openly celebrated; and the liberality of Constantine enabled the clergy to invest the ritual with some of the pomp and magnificence which had hitherto been confined to paganism. The heathens were naturally filled with envy at witnessing such a revolution. They circulated a pretended oracle in Greek verse, purporting that the Christian religion would only endure for three hundred and sixty-five years. According to this miserable forgery, Jesus Christ had been a simple, well-meaning man; but his apostles, and particularly St. Peter, were magicians, who by their sorceries had

enchanted the universe. The charm, however, was destined only to last for three hundred and sixty-five years, after which the ancient religion would be restored in its former splendour. This imposture—the powerless cry of a sinking creed—does not appear to have alarmed the advocates of Christianity; they treated it with contempt, and it soon sunk into oblivion.

The Jews were not less indignant at the signal triumph of Christianity than the pagans, and they were far more bitter in the expression of their malice. Constantine had to issue several edicts for the protection of Christian converts from the persecutions of their Jewish brethren; and his son had to debar the Jews from the possession of Christian slaves on account of the abuse they made of their power. The abolition of crucifixion, which took away “the reproach of the cross,” may be regarded as the completion of the triumph of Christianity over paganism. An effort, as we shall subsequently see, was made to renew the struggle in the reign of the apostate Julian; but it was the last rallying of the vital energies in a dying system, and the exhaustion it produced served to hasten final dissolution.

But though Christ's church was thus triumphant, yet, as it must be “militant here on earth” until the second advent of our Lord, we shall now see it exposed to dangers from a different class of enemies,—from its own members, whose internal discords were scarcely less perilous than the assaults of open foes. No sooner were the pagans and Jews overcome, than the Christian

faith was assailed by the Donatists and the Arians: the disorders they occasioned must unfortunately occupy a large space in our view of the condition of the Christian church after its establishment by Constantine.

CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY DIVISIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
TO THE TIME OF ARIUS.

IN the preceding chapters, we have seen that the first disputes in the Christian church arose from the narrow and intolerant system of Judaism, which some of the earliest converts were anxious to maintain. The controversies on this subject gradually died away as the operations of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the Gentile world became more manifest; and they disappeared when the overthrow of the Jewish economy rendered it absurd to insist on the observance of the laws of Moses. To these succeeded the various sects of the Gnostics, who endeavoured to combine the simple truths of the Gospel with the speculations of the East, and to explain the great Christian mystery, "God manifest in the flesh," by the doctrine of emanations, which mingled with the ancient creeds of Asia and Egypt. These heresies produced little effect in the western world, where the Grecian philosophy was too firmly established to be shaken by the gloomy metaphysics of the East; but they were popular in Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, and not without influence in the Seven Churches of Asia. A modified form, or rather, several new varieties, of the Gnostic heresy arose in Alexandria. The extensive commerce of that city, and the celebrity of its schools and literary institutions, had drawn thither persons of almost every

variety of creed in the known world, and representatives of all the philosophic sects both in Europe and Asia. It was the passion of some of the Alexandrians to form one universal religion and philosophy by combining together all these varieties of opinion, rejecting such portions as did not readily accord with a harmonious system. This was called Eclectic, or selected philosophy; and of this there were more varieties than there were original creeds to be united. The Jew thus blended the Mosaic Law with paganism and philosophy; the Christian still more readily yielded to the temptation, because he was anxious to shew that his religion harmonized with the universal truths recognized by mankind from the earliest ages. The simple doctrines of the Gospel were thus obscured and lost in a cloud of endless disquisitions on the nature and essence of deity, the relations between spirit and matter, the origin of evil, and countless other questions beyond the range of human intelligence. Sect rose after sect, explanation was superseded by explanation; but, in spite of all these disputes, the main articles of the faith were held by the great bulk of the Alexandrian Christians, and the Gnostic heresies fell one after another into quiet oblivion.

Christianity was introduced into Persia in the time of the apostles. The Parthians, who then ruled that country, appear to have been the most tolerant of the pagan nations; nowhere did the Jewish colonies enjoy such protection, and it was the only spot to which Christians could fly during the early persecutions with any hope of obtaining a shelter. It is probable that

the chief cause of this toleration was the difference between the religion of the Parthians and their subjects. The foundation of the old Persian religion was Dualism,—the existence of two principles, one good and the other evil, called Ormuzd and Ahriman: they worshipped light and fire, as the representatives of the beneficent deity, and they particularly offered homage, as the type of that principle which should eventually triumph over the powers of Ahriman and darkness.

After having been long hidden in obscurity, this religion was suddenly restored to its ancient pre-eminence when Ardeshr̄ Babegan, descended from the old line of native princes, overthrew the Parthian dynasty, and restored the independence of Persia. The first care of the new monarch was to restore the ancient religion. An assembly of the Mobeds, or priests, from every part of the kingdom, was convoked; and by their exertions, a code was formed of all the remaining laws and institutions of Zoroaster, who was regarded as the original founder of the Persian religion. The sacred fire was rekindled on the Magian altars, and every other form of worship was strictly prohibited within the restored kingdom of Persia. This great revolution suddenly arrested the progress of Christianity eastwards, and it was thrown back upon the western provinces of Asia and upon Europe; but the numerous heresies of the third and fourth centuries showed that many Christians had been tainted by the wild speculations of Magian superstition.

Manicheism may be regarded as the Persian form of

Gnosticism, and also as the form that was most extensive and lasting. It was founded by Mani, or Manes, a native Persian, who had been converted to Christianity about the middle of the third century. Having travelled through Northern India and China, he acquired a knowledge and love of the gloomy mysticism taught by the ascetic philosophers of these countries, and resolved to form a new religion by combining Christianity with the principle of Dualism. To entice converts, he declared that he was the Paraclete or Comforter promised by Jesus Christ; and as his name, Mani or Menahem, actually has this signification in the Syrian language, many were induced to listen to his pretensions. Like most of the Oriental heretics, Mani inculcated on his followers, and especially on his clergy, the duty of submitting to voluntary penances and privations, in order to mortify the flesh, which he supposed mankind to have derived from the evil principle, and to purify the spirit, which he declared to be an emanation from the author of good. Many who have not adopted the Manichean theory that the created world is the work of Ahriman, have adopted his views respecting the duty of abstaining from the enjoyments it affords; and it is probable that the Egyptian monks derived their practice of extraordinary austerities from the tenets of the Manichees.

Shah-púr, the second monarch of the restored dynasty of Persia, was for a time a follower of Mani; but, finding that the Mobeds were likely to resent and punish his apostasy, he returned to his ancient creed, and forced Mani to seek refuge in Turkestan. It

was during his exile that the pretended prophet composed his gospels, of which only a few fragments have been preserved to our times.

In the reign of Baharam, the grandson of Shah-púr, Mani was invited back to the Persian court, and flattered with the hope of the royal conversion. Whether Baharam really entertained any idea of embracing the new creed, or whether his apparent kindness was an artifice to lull suspicion, has been disputed; but no sooner was Mani in his power, than he convened a council of the Mobeds, and summoned Mani to plead the cause of his creed before the assembly. The heresiarch was overwhelmed by the multitude of his adversaries; sentence of death was pronounced; he was executed with cruel tortures, and many of his leading followers shared the same fate. But the Manichean heresy did not perish with its author, it spread even into Western Europe, where traces of it were to be found so late as the fifteenth century. It must, however, be remembered that the imputation of Manicheism was often employed to cast odium on suspected sects, such as the Albigenses, who held no tenet in common with the doctrines of Mani.

We have already seen that the question, how those who had lapsed into idolatry were to be treated when they repented of their guilt, was the source of a violent schism in the African churches. As these churches had suffered most severely in the last general persecution, the question was revived when tranquillity was restored under Constantine; and it assumed a new aspect in consequence of the numbers

who were accused of being *traditores*; that is, of having given up the sacred books to be burned by the pagan inquisitors. Mensurius, bishop of Carthage, was accused of having thus betrayed his duty; and Donatus, bishop of *Casæ Nigræ*, openly separated from his communion. On the death of Mensurius, Cecilian was elected to fill the vacant see; but the validity of his consecration was disputed, because Felix, the bishop who had performed the ceremony, was accused of being a *traditor*. A synod of the African bishops assembled to determine this dispute, under the presidency of Secundus, the primate of Numidia. The Donatists had the majority in the synod, and they declared that Cecilian had no right to the episcopal dignity; and having pronounced his deprivation, they elected Majorinus in his stead. The money which Constantine sent to repair the losses sustained by the African churches during the late persecution, was claimed by both parties; and the emperor was beset by the emissaries of Cecilian and Donatus, each of whom stigmatized their rivals as heretics and traitors. A council was held at Rome to determine between the rival claimants: after a long examination, the assembled bishops decided that Cecilian was legally consecrated; but they avoided pronouncing any sentence against his adversaries, with the exception of Donatus, whom they condemned as the author of the dissensions in the African church.

The Donatists complained that the council had determined the legality of Cecilian's consecration, without discussing the preliminary question whether

Felix, who had performed the ceremony, had, or had not, been a *traditor*. But this, in the view of the Italian bishops, was really indifferent to the issue; for, so long as Felix was recognised as a bishop by the Church, they held that he could legally perform all episcopal functions. To silence their clamours, Constantine convoked a council of the Gallic bishops at Arles, for as Gaul had escaped from the persecution of Dioclesian, there were none of its bishops who could be suspected of being *traditors*; they were, therefore, likely to be impartial judges of the question. A tedious inquiry ended in clearing the memory of Felix; at least, the evidence of his having betrayed the sacred books, was declared to be vague and insufficient. The Donatists, again condemned, appealed from the council to the emperor; but Constantine refused to hear their complaints, and exhorted all parties to aim at the restoration of peace and concord.

A second Donatus, the one who gave his name to the sect, raised new troubles in Africa; he was a man of great learning, eloquence, and talent, whose chief ambition was to become the leader of a party. His austerities imposed upon the multitude: he soon found himself at the head of a considerable number of followers, including several bishops, who implicitly submitted to his guidance. The violence of the Donatists led to several seditions, which threatened dangerous consequences to the peace of the empire. Constantine was compelled to send several of their leaders into exile; but on their making submissions, he consented to their restoration.

The moderation of Constantine did not restore peace to Africa; the Donatists denied that their adversaries belonged to the true Church, declared their sacraments invalid, and their ministry pernicious. But dissensions soon arose among the Donatists themselves; and one sect, called the Circumcellions, proceeded to such extremes of fanaticism, as to render the armed interference of the temporal government absolutely necessary. The Circumcellions derived their name from their marauding expeditions; they were the rudest, and most uncivilized peasants of Africa, ignorant of every language but their native Punic, and ready to adopt any excuse for adopting a life of wandering and plunder. They were armed with immense clubs, which they called "the staves of Israel;" and they believed that they conferred a blessing on those whom they deprived of life. Their war-cry, "Praise be to God," was for many years the terror of Northern Africa; for they neither gave nor took quarter, and they took a diabolical pleasure in torturing their victims. Nor were they more merciful to themselves. They took a pride in submitting to the most horrible penances; and many of them committed suicide in public, hoping to be honoured as martyrs. The commanders of these banditti were called "Chiefs of the Saints;" while they preached the most rigid austerities, they practised the most revolting licentiousness, and their camps and their churches were equally polluted by drunkenness and debauchery. The imperial armies sent against these enthusiasts, were sometimes unable to withstand their fanatical fury;

they continued to harass Africa during the remainder of Constantine's reign, for the attention of the emperor and the Church was diverted from the local disturbances of the Donatists, to the more extensive and perilous effects produced by the growing prevalence of the Arian heresy.

We have already noticed that the speculations of Oriental metaphysics, and the subtilties of Grecian philosophy, had greatly corrupted the simple truths of Christianity in Alexandria. While the other Christian churches were content to receive the doctrines of Revelation, the Alexandrians were seized with a rage for explaining all their mysteries; and they particularly attached themselves to the doctrine of the Trinity, which they overlaid with minute and trifling distinctions, some of which were neither consistent nor intelligible. These disquisitions were not merely idle, but mischievous; they afforded ambitious presbyters a pretence for impugning the orthodoxy of their rulers, and a ready excuse for the ambition of those who wished to have the honour of founding a sect. Both motives appear to have actuated Arius, a distinguished presbyter of the Alexandrian church. He was a man of great talents, extensive learning, ready eloquence, and calm temper; his figure was tall, his complexion pale, his countenance remarkably placid; and these personal advantages gave weight to his insinuating address, winning manners, and persuasive conversation. Soon after his admission into the Church as deacon, he had been excommunicated by his bishop for favouring the partisans of Miletius, who had been

deprived for idolatry; but on making proper submissions, he was restored to his office, and acquired such influence, that he aspired to the bishopric of Alexandria. The election of Alexander, when a vacancy occurred, filled him with jealousy. He accused the new bishop of teaching false doctrine, when he asserted that the Son was co-eternal with the Father; declaring that the Word was only the first of created beings, although he participated in the divine nature.

The abilities of Arius gave popularity to a controversy which was only proper to be discussed in private conference. Two bishops, a host of presbyters and deacons, and a large proportion of the laity, at once embraced the opinions of Arius; seven hundred virgins are said to have followed their example; and ardent missionaries presented themselves to spread the same doctrine in foreign lands. A rage for controversy seemed to have seized upon the Christians of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. The most sublime mysteries, transcending the powers of the human mind, were discussed in the streets and markets; families were divided; private houses became schools of disputation; and the frenzy of contention armed one brother against another.

The Bishop of Alexandria held a council of the Egyptian prelates; Arius and his party were condemned; but Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, and another prelate of the same name, distinguished as the great ecclesiastical historian, embraced the Arian cause, and perhaps adopted the new creed. Several bishops permitted Arius to exercise his clerical func-

tions, and he was thus able to disseminate his doctrines from the pulpit; but, not contented with such simple means, he published his opinions in the shape of popular songs, adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the humbler classes of society, and these songs being set to familiar tunes, spread rapidly; Egypt, Libya, and the East, greatly extending the influence and popularity of the new creed.

This sudden burst of dissension was the source of great uneasiness to the emperor. He consulted Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, who made light of the controversy; declaring that the Bishop of Alexandria had dealt harshly with Arius, on account of some mere verbal dispute, and that the entire question turned on some slight philosophical distinctions which no way concerned the purity of the faith. The emperor wrote to both parties, earnestly recommending peace and unity. He sent the letter by Osius, bishop of Cordova, whom he earnestly requested to mediate between the controversialists, declaring that these disputes deprived his days of tranquillity, and his nights of repose. Osius held a second council at Alexandria, but the result of its deliberations only increased the confusion. The great majority decided against Arius, but the minority refused to yield; its activity more than compensated for its deficiency in numbers, and its boldness was withheld by no scruple. Some of the Arians were so violent as to mutilate the statues of the emperor: their adversaries proposed that they should be severely punished; but Constantine, with great good sense, putting his hand to his face,

declared, "I do not feel a wound," and refused to be the author of a system of persecution.

All former shades of heresy appeared to be lost for a time in Arianism; and in many instances differences of opinion were the mere pretexts for disguising jealousy, rancour, and personal animosity. It was justly said by the Bishop of Poitiers, that "there were as many sources of blasphemy as there were faults among Christians; as many doctrines as there were inclinations." The Arians were far from being agreed amongst themselves; no less than eighteen different models of religion were proposed by the various leaders of the sectaries; they were only agreed in what they should pull down, but they could not determine what they should set up in its stead.

In reading the history of this controversy, it is impossible to avoid noticing the evil that arose from the perversion of the use of the word "church," first introduced by St. Cyprian. The Arians and their opponents not only limited the application of the term "church" to the clerical body, but regarded that body as invested with corporate capacities and powers which conferred legislative and executive rights. They believed on both sides that the clerical body, in its corporate capacity, had a right to declare what was the true faith, and to make their declaration binding on the consciences of all believers; and hence the struggle was not so much to establish the truth of one doctrine or the other, as to secure the predominance of a party in the clerical corporation, and thus secure a monopoly of spiritual power. The inconsistency of

such a plan with the kingdom of Christ, and the true nature of a Christian church, has been ably shewn by Archbishop Whately, in his valuable treatise on Christ's kingdom.

“Among the things excluded from the Christian system, we are fully authorized to include all subjection of the Christian world, permanently, and from generation to generation, to some one Spiritual Ruler (whether an individual man or a Church) the delegate, representative and vicegerent of Christ; whose authority should be binding on the conscience of all, and decisive on every point of faith. Jesus Himself, who told his Disciples that it was ‘expedient for them that He should go away, that He might send them another Comforter, who should abide with them for ever,’ could not possibly have failed, had such been his design, to refer them to the man, or body of men, who should in perpetual succession, be the depositary of this divine consolation and supremacy. And it is wholly incredible that He Himself should be perpetually spoken of and alluded to as the Head of His Church, without any reference to any supreme Head on Earth, as fully representing Him and bearing universal rule in his name,—whether Peter or any other Apostle, or any successor of one of these,—this, I say, is utterly incredible, supposing the Apostles or their Master had really designed that there should be for the universal Church any institution answering to the oracle of God under the Old Dispensation, at the Tabernacle or the Temple.

“The Apostle Paul, in speaking of miracles as ‘the

signs of an Apostle,' evidently implies that no one not possessing such miraculous gifts as his*, much less, without possessing any at all,—could be entitled to be regarded as even on a level with the Apostles; yet he does not, by virtue of that his high office, claim for himself, or allow to Peter or any other, supreme rule over all the Churches†. And while he claims and exercises the right to decide authoritatively on points of faith and of practice on which he had received express revelations, he does not leave his converts any injunction to apply, hereafter, when he shall be removed from them, to the Bishop or Rulers or any other Church, for such decisions; or to any kind of permanent living Oracle to dictate to all Christians in all Ages. Nor does he even ever hint at any subjection of one Church to another, singly, or to any number of others collectively;—to that of Jerusalem, for instance, or of Rome; or to any kind of general Council.

“It appears plainly from the sacred narrative, that though the many Churches which the Apostles founded were branches of one *Spiritual* Brotherhood, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Heavenly Head, —though there was ‘one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,’ for all of them, yet they were each a distinct, independent community *on Earth*, united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection, and respect; but not having any one recognised Head on Earth, or

“* 1 Cor. xiv. 18.

† Gal. ii. 7—9.

acknowledging any sovereignty of one of these Societies over others*.

“It is worth remarking also, that, as if on purpose to guard against the assumption, which might, not unnaturally, have taken place, of some supremacy—such as no Church was designed to enjoy—on the part of Jerusalem, the fountain-head of the religion, it was by the *special appointment* of the Holy Spirit that Saul† and Barnabas were *ordained* to the very highest office, the Apostleship, *not* by the hands of *the other Apostles*, or of any persons at *Jerusalem*, but by the *Elders of Antioch*. This would have been the less remarkable had *no human* ordination at all taken place, but merely a special immediate appointment of them by divine revelation. But the command given was, ‘separate me let them go‡.’ Some reason for such a procedure there must have been; and it does seem probable that it was designed for the very purpose (among others) of impressing on men’s minds the independence and equality of the several Churches on Earth.

“* Generally speaking, the Apostles appear to have established a distinct Church in each considerable city; so that there were several even in a single Province; as, for instance, in Macedonia, those of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Amphipolis, &c.: and the like in the Province of Achaia, and elsewhere.

“† For whether Saul’s previous call to the Apostleship by Jesus Christ Himself, were, or were not, already *publicly known to the Church*, it is plain that both he and Barnabas were, at this time, by divine command ‘separated,’ and solemnly ordained to the ‘work to which the Lord had appointed them,’ and were thereupon and thenceforward recognised as Apostles.

“‡ Acts xiii. 2, 3.

“ On the whole, then, considering in addition to all these circumstances, the number and the variety of the Epistles of Paul, (to say nothing of those of the other Apostles,) and the deep anxiety he manifests for the continuance of his converts in the right faith, and his earnest warnings of them* against the dangers to their faith, which he foresaw; and considering also the incalculable importance of such an institution (supposing it to exist) as a permanent living Oracle and supreme Ruler of the Church, on Earth; and the necessity of pointing it out so clearly that no one could possibly, except through wilful blindness and obstinacy, be in any doubt as to the place and persons whom the Lord should have thus ‘chosen to cause his name to dwell’ therein—especially, as a plain reference to this infallible judge, guide, and governor, would have been so obvious, easy, short, and decisive a mode of guarding against the doubts, errors, and dissensions which he so anxiously apprehended;—considering, I say, all this, it does seem to me a perfect moral impossibility, that Paul and the other sacred writers should have written as they have done, without any mention or allusion to any thing of the kind, if it had been a part (and it must have been a most *essential* part, if it were any) of the Christian System. They do not merely omit all references to any supreme, and infallible Head and Oracle of the Universal Church,—to any Man or Body, as the representative and vicegerent of Christ, but they omit it in

* Acts xx.

such a manner, and under such circumstances, as plainly to amount to an exclusion.

“It may be added that the circumstance of our Lord’s having *deferred* the commencement of his Church till after his own *departure* in bodily person, from the earth, seems to have been designed as a further safeguard against the notion I have been alluding to. Had He publicly presided in bodily person subsequently to the completion of the Redemption by his death, over a Church in Jerusalem or elsewhere, there would have been more plausibility in the claim to *supremacy* which might have been set up and admitted, on behalf of that Church, and of his own successors in the Government of it. His previously withdrawing, made it the more easily to be understood that He was to remain the spiritual Head in Heaven, of the spiritual Church-universal; and consequently of all particular Churches, equally, in all parts of the world.”

The appeal of the orthodox and Arian parties to the Emperor Constantine, was the first great departure from the principles on which Christ had established his Church, when he declared that his kingdom was not of this world. It was an error in which both parties were equally reprehensible; each hoped to obtain a majority in the council, and to impose their own opinions on the minority. Constantine’s motives appear to have been purely secular; he was anxious to bring Christianity into the same close connexion with the Byzantine empire that polytheism had held with the old constitution of Rome; and it is remarkable,

that at the time he convoked this council of Christian prelates, he still bore the title, and used the official ensigns of *Pontifex Maximus*, or head of the pagan priesthood. Constantine viewed Christianity not only as a religion, but as “an establishment;” and his reason for thus regarding it is stated in his celebrated letter to Arius: “I am persuaded that if I should be sufficiently fortunate to bring all men to honour the same God, such a change of religion would bring a corresponding revolution in the government of the state.” It was with the hope of producing this religious unity, and founding upon it the new form of imperial government which he had projected, that he addressed circular letters to all the bishops throughout his empire, inviting them to assemble at the city of Nice, in Bithynia, and at the same time ordered his officers to defray the travelling expenses of the prelates out of the imperial exchequer.

In the beginning of the year of our Lord 325, the bishops, accompanied by the most learned of their presbyters and deacons, began to arrive at Nice from every quarter of the Roman dominions. They quitted their churches amidst the prayers and blessings of their congregations. All the cities through which they passed vied with each other in treating them with respectful hospitality; and they were received at Nice with a magnificence limited only by the simplicity of manners and life for which the prelates of that age were conspicuous. In the beginning of May, Constantine arrived at Nice, where three hundred and eighteen bishops were assembled, of whom seventeen

only were infected with the opinions of Arius. Athanasius, who subsequently became the most formidable opponent of the Arians, attended the council in the capacity of a deacon; but the inferiority of his rank did not prevent him from taking a leading share in the deliberations. His ready eloquence and skilful reasoning astonished all who heard him, and won for him the highest approbation from the emperor.

Among the assembled prelates there were many who had private disputes and causes of complaint against each other; they believed this a favourable opportunity for bringing them before the notice of their sovereign, and there was reason to fear that the time of the council would be frittered away in the discussion of personal grievances. Constantine commanded that all who had reason to complain of their brethren should state their charges in writing. He soon received a vast number of memorials, which he sealed in a packet, and fixed a day for giving a reply. At the appointed time he appeared with the packet still unopened, and addressed the litigants,—“There is a day in which all these suits will be tried, the day of the final judgment of the quick and the dead; they have their own proper tribunal, that of God himself. I am but a mere mortal, and it does not behove me to decide causes in which the accusers and the accused are consecrated to the service of the Omnipotent. They should live without incurring reproaches, and without uttering any. Let us imitate the divine goodness, and pardon others, as God has pardoned us; let us efface the very memory of these disputes by a sin-

cere reconciliation, and attend only to the cause of the common faith which has brought us together." Having thus spoken, he threw the whole bundle of memorials into the flame, and at the same time declared that he had never read a line of any of them.

It is not improbable that the ecclesiastical historians have put stronger language into the mouth of Constantine than he used on this occasion; but there is no reason to doubt the principal facts of the narrative, which are highly creditable to the wisdom of the emperor, and quite consistent with the circumstances of the Church in that age. The nature and extent of episcopal jurisdiction had not been yet defined, and there were differences in the administration of dioceses which would have given rise to much tedious discussion, had not the emperor interfered.

The sessions of the council lasted from the 19th of June to the 25th of August; but no particulars are recorded of the number of their meetings, the form in which they were held, or who presided over their debates. The result of their deliberations was the adoption of the Nicene creed, in which a single word condemns the heresy of Arius. It was declared that Christ was "of one substance with the Father," in Greek, *Homoousion*. It happened that a word differing from this only by a single letter, *Homoiousion*, expresses the Arian opinion, that Christ is "of like or similar substance to the Father;" and hence the Arians represented that the difference was but trifling, and quite insufficient to justify their exclusion from the Church.

It may reasonably be doubted whether the bishops, when they first resolved to prepare a creed as a standard of faith, contemplated the use of the secular power to enforce its adoption. But one error naturally led to another; and having once made the fatal mistake of deciding articles of faith by the vote of a majority, they were not long in proceeding to the still more deplorable measure of coercing the minority. The readiness with which the emperor, who was still unbaptized, and still the official head of polytheism, offered his aid to enforce the council's act of uniformity, was in itself sufficient to have alarmed men whose judgments were not warped by party feeling. He banished Arius and those who obstinately adhered to his cause; an edict was issued, commanding all heretical books to be burned, and denouncing the penalty of death against those who refused to surrender them. Such an edict naturally provoked much censure. Its disproportionate penalties became the theme of pagan mockery, and afforded constant food for ridicule to the wits of Rome: they exposed the absurdity of menacing the possessors of such books with death, while the authors of them were only punished with exile; but no one exclaimed against the still greater absurdity of Christians beginning to persecute each other at a time when they had only just escaped from pagan persecution.

It was lamentable to see Christians treating their erring brethren with more severity than heathens, and adopting the spirit of the persecuting edicts of Dioclesian, when he proscribed the sacred Scriptures.

Such a course of proceeding did not put a stop to the progress of Arianism. The doctrine was preached with equal secrecy and activity; while the charge of having adopted its errors, was frequently a cover for the indulgence of envy and animosity between the ministers of the Church. Four years had not elapsed ere the Nicene fathers had reason to lament the imprudent use which they had made of the imperial authority. Constantia, the favourite sister of the emperor, had always been a partisan of Arius; she exerted her influence to procure his recall from exile; and Constantine not only pardoned him, but issued an order that he should be publicly admitted to communion in the church of Alexandria. Arius died on the very day appointed for his triumph, probably by poison; but some of the prelates who favoured his cause, particularly Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, obtained such influence over Constantine, that he adopted the Arian tenets himself, and discouraged all who maintained opposite opinions.

The heresy of Arius, though the principal, was not the only controversy which engaged the attention of the Council of Nice. A censure was passed on the erroneous opinions of Meletius, and an effort was made to reconcile the Novatians, who had adopted Donatist opinions, to the Church. These minor differences did not, however, attract much attention; neither was there any difficulty in terminating the paschal controversy, which had hitherto divided the Eastern and Western churches. It was decided that Easter should be celebrated according to the rule which has been

since observed in most churches; and the construction of a paschal canon was entrusted to Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea.

Letters were addressed in the name of the council to the churches of Alexandria, Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis. These circulars are remarkable for the mildness with which they speak of Arius and his errors; they are written in a tone of sorrow rather than anger, and no triumph is expressed at his defeat and punishment. "You have doubtless heard," say the bishops, "or you will soon hear, what has happened to the author of the heresy. We have been careful not to exult over a man who has received the chastisement which his fault merited." This letter was accompanied by another, which the emperor addressed to the church of Alexandria; in this epistle he thanks God for having confounded error by the light of truth, he bears testimony to the zeal and diligence with which the prelates had investigated the matters brought before them, and bewails the obstinacy of the Arians. He concludes by exhorting his subjects to receive the decrees of the council, and for the future preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Thus ended the celebrated Council of Nice, the first assembly of Christian prelates convoked by public authority. Its history has been written only by its panegyrists, and therefore much may have been concealed which would not have tended to raise the character of some of its members; but, making all due allowances for this drawback, enough remains indis-

putable to justify the respect with which its decisions have been received by all Christian churches. The greatest error of the prelates, and the source of all the evils which subsequently fell on the Eastern churches, was their claim to legislate for all Christian communities, and thus to give Christianity a political unity inconsistent with its spiritual nature. This was as clearly beyond their power as it was beyond their right. All that they could do legitimately was, to declare the opinion of the particular churches to which they belonged; and when they went beyond this, they were forced to seek the aid of the secular power, and render the Church dependent on the State. From such a state of dependence the Eastern churches never recovered; and their history, from the Council of Nice to the overthrow of the Byzantine empire, with some few bright exceptions, displays a continued departure from the purity of Christian life, the simplicity of Christian doctrine, and the spirituality of Christian organization. In the West, where paganism was still in the ascendant, the proceedings of the council produced little immediate effect, save so far as they afforded a proof that Constantine had definitively separated himself from the cause of polytheism.

The sacrifice of independence made by the Nicene prelates, did not even accomplish the temporary object which it was intended to gain. Arius and his associates, with zeal sharpened by persecution, still continued to disseminate their doctrines; and even many of the prelates who accepted the Nicene creed, subjoined interpretations to it which quite changed its

nature. A dangerous spirit of quibbling and reservation was thus introduced, which in the next reign led to many scandalous examples of hypocrisy and downright apostasy. The Homooousion was explained away when it was not rejected; new and more stringent formularies were devised in several dioceses, and these produced fresh controversies, which greatly weakened Christianity, and gave the pagans courage to make fresh efforts for its overthrow.

CHAPTER XV.

LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY
BY CONSTANTINE.

ROME continued to be the metropolis and stronghold of idolatry; its citizens, generally, regarded the favour that the emperor showed to Christianity with undisguised hatred, and they embraced the opportunity which the misfortunes of the emperor's family afforded, to display their animosity. Constantine was far from being a perfect character. The possession of despotic power had produced a baneful influence on his mind; he yielded to the impulses of passion and jealousy, which sometimes led him to the committal of atrocious crimes. His eldest son, Crispus, was sacrificed on a false accusation; and the Empress Fausta, who had accused the unfortunate prince, having been proved guilty of several other iniquities, was smothered in a bath by order of the emperor. The Romans, who had endured the far greater cruelties of preceding despots, affected to be greatly shocked at the cruelties of Constantine; libels and lampoons were circulated against him; and at length he left the ancient capital of the empire with a firm resolution never to return.

But Rome, under any circumstances, could scarcely have been the favourite residence of Constantine. It had become the seat of idleness and profligacy; licentiousness obtained the honours formerly accorded to

virtue, and probity was associated with disgrace. During a famine, the citizens had obtained an edict for the banishment of strangers from the city; they enforced it against all professors of the liberal arts; but they retained all the actors, performers at public spectacles, and dancing girls; the last alone amounting to the number of three thousand.

Their passion for gladiatorial shows and the games in the Circus was continually increasing; and Constantine's opposition to these barbarous sports was not less injurious to his popularity, than his favour to the new religion. Indeed, both were associated in the mind of the populace, because the Christians, from the very beginning, had condemned the barbarous murders of the amphitheatre.

Constantine resolved to give a new capital to the empire. It has been said that a similar project was formed by Julius Cæsar, who wished to remove all the splendours of Rome to the plains of Troy, and that this was also the first design of Constantine. A very little observation and reflection must have shewn him the superior advantages of Byzantium, which is probably the best situation in the world for the capital of an empire. Built on the triangular tongue of land that faces the entrance of the Thracian Bosphorus, it was a mart for the commerce of the Euxine and Mediterranean seas; the noble bay, called from its beauty and shape, the Golden Horn, at once protected it on the north, and afforded it an excellent harbour; the south was washed by the Propontis, (*Sea of Marmora*,) which equally yielded protection, facilitated

commerce, and supplied abundance of fish; a low range of hills made the western, or land side, easy of defence against the plundering tribes of Thrace. Byzantium had been almost destroyed during the late civil wars; but it was now raised from its ashes by the emperor, and received the name of Constantinople. The cities of Greece and Asia were stripped of their finest monuments of art to decorate the new capital; the best artificers were collected from every part of the empire to be employed in the erection of its palaces and churches; the entire revenues of the empire were lavishly expended to accelerate its completion; and in the three hundred and thirty-fourth year of the Christian era, it was solemnly dedicated as the Second Rome, and new metropolis of the empire.

It would be out of place to dwell on the political consequences of this important change; but its religious influences were great and striking. Constantinople was from the very beginning a Christian city; if the personal vanity of the emperor induced him to have questionable honours paid to his image at the feast of its dedication, which, however, is doubtful, there were no other vestiges of paganism visible on the solemn occasion. The bishops and clergy in solemn procession offered up prayers for the prosperity of the new city, rejoicing to find that in the rising metropolis there was not a single pagan temple.

Rome, deprived of its political importance, could no longer support the declining cause of paganism; the fortunes of the empire had long been associated with

those of the city, and the gods of Rome were regarded as the authors of the prosperity it attained, and the dominion it enjoyed. But when the seat of government was removed, the local character of the heathen deities, which had long been their chief recommendation, became a leading cause of their neglect; the gods of Rome ceased to attract homage when Rome itself was no longer regarded with reverence. Old men, from habit, still frequented the temples; but the rising generation gradually forsook the pagan superstitions, and heathenism expired so silently in Italy, that it is impossible to assign the date of its final disappearance.

Constantine did not so much establish Christianity as recognise the form in which it was established already. In surveying the measures he adopted for giving the Church a legal constitution, it is of importance to remember, that under all the preceding emperors, it was a fundamental maxim of the Roman constitution, that the care of religion was both the right and the duty of the civil magistrate. We may lament that such a maxim was introduced from paganism into Christianity; but we cannot be surprised that the Christian emperors retained the powers which had been granted to their pagan predecessors, and could not see any reason why any of their imperial prerogatives should be forfeited by their conversion. On the other hand, the prelates and clergy, having so long experienced the hostility of public authority, were disposed to exaggerate the importance of its protection, and to seek its aid when it would have

been more prudent to have relied on their own resources.

It is calculated that there were about eighteen hundred bishops in the Christian church at the accession of Constantine. The extent and boundaries of their several dioceses had been variously and accidentally fixed by the circumstances under which the several churches were founded; some were confined to a single village, others extended over an entire province. Where a diocese was too extensive for the administration of a single prelate, rural bishops, called *chor-episcopi*, were appointed, who voted in the synods, and trained the candidates for ordination. The bishops were elected by the joint suffrages of the presbytery and the people, subject to the approbation of a synod of the provincial bishops; but there were as yet no established rules for the conduct of these elections, and disputed elections frequently aggravated the controversies which arose from the heresy of Arius.

The wealth of the clergy, or rather, the amount of the funds placed at their disposal, rapidly increased when Constantine granted to his subjects the full power of bequeathing any part, or the whole, of their fortunes to the Church, and assigned in each city a regular allowance of corn to supply the fund of ecclesiastical charity. The ecclesiastical revenues of each diocese were divided into four parts; one for the support of the bishop, one for the maintenance of his clergy, one for the relief of the poor, and one to defray the expenses of public worship. Some churches had separate endowments, the funds arising from

which were administered by their respective presbyteries. Great care was exercised to prevent any abuse in the management of these funds, and peculation was a very rare vice among the early Christians.

The discipline of the Church was not changed by Constantine; but he allowed it to be enforced by the authority of the state. But the limits between civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction were not, however, accurately defined in his reign, and it was not until a later age that inconvenience arose from the temporal effects of spiritual censures.

Synods and councils were the most important aids to the growth of ecclesiastical power. They regulated all disputes respecting discipline and doctrine; and the possession of these legislative functions naturally led them to become anxious for the power of enforcing their decrees. As the Church was constituted, it possessed ample powers for the maintenance and diffusion of truth; but, at the same time, some of its powers were capable of being perverted to the gratification of ambition; and, unfortunately, the seeds of corruption were not long in making themselves manifest.

From what we have said, it is evident that Constantine can in no sense be regarded as the *founder* of the Christian *church*; its organization was complete in all its parts before he took it under his protection. What has been called the *union* of Church and State, or what should more properly be termed the secularization of Christ's spiritual kingdom, began in the reign of Constantine; but the nature of this departure from the Gospel system was not clearly seen by any

party at the time, because the relations between Church and State remained undefined, and were continually varied according to the convenience of the parties. On the one hand, the civil magistrate, as such, was invested with a control over spiritual affairs; and on the other, Christian prelates, by virtue of their office, received power in temporal matters. This pretended union was, however, in fact the constant source of real discord: on the one hand, emperors were found prescribing articles of faith to the churches; on the other, prelates were seen to absolve subjects from their allegiance, and to claim the power of deposing sovereigns. The former evil prevailed most in the East, and the latter in the West; but both originated in the same neglect of the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and the attempt to make it a kingdom of this world. His cotemporaries were far from believing that Constantine's patronage of the Christian prelates arose from his pure zeal for the Christian religion; and it is a significant fact, that the Christians after his death did not reverence him as a saint, while the heathen honoured him as a god.

Helena, the mother of Constantine, was more devotedly attached to Christianity than her son; but her piety was accompanied by excessive credulity: she was anxious to identify the localities which had been rendered interesting to Christians by the labours and sufferings of their Saviour; there were persons interested in gratifying her laudable curiosity; they identified the places almost at random, and devised pretended miracles to confirm their guesses. The first

public fraud of which Christian teachers appear to have been the authors, was occasioned by Helena's visit to Jerusalem; she wished to see Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre. It was easy to give these names to the places which conjecture suggested; but there can now be little doubt that the guesses of Helena's guides were erroneous, and that what has been ever since shewn as the Holy Sepulchre, has no sustainable pretensions to its title. But this was not all; the persons employed in levelling the ground for the church which St. Helena proposed to erect on the hallowed spot, pretended that they had found the very cross on which Christ had been crucified, the nails by which he had been attached to it, the inscriptions set up by order of Pilate, and the crosses on which the two thieves had been crucified. The identity of the true cross was attested by several pretended miracles, of which none was so remarkable as the credulity of those who received them. A magnificent church was erected over the pretended Holy Sepulchre; another was built at Bethlehem on the spot where Christ was supposed to have been born; and a third on the Mount of Olives, where he had ascended into Heaven. A large portion of the cross, inclosed in a shrine of silver, was deposited with the Bishop of Jerusalem, who only exhibited it to the people on the anniversary of the crucifixion; part of the remainder was sent to Rome, where the basilica of one of the palaces was changed into a church for its reception. Pope Sylvester instituted a festival to commemorate this event, which he called "*The Invention of the Holy Cross*," a more

appropriate name than he intended. The portion of the cross which Constantine retained was inclosed in his statue; and the sacred nails were wrought into his helmet and the harness of his horse, to serve as an amulet in the day of battle.

As the interference of Constantine in his imperial capacity injured the spiritual character of Christianity, and tended to make Christ's kingdom one of this world, so the pilgrimage of Helena to Jerusalem became the fertile source of many superstitions, which, however innocent in their first appearance, led to many gross and degrading corruptions. Nowhere is the divine wisdom, by which the Gospel histories were dictated, more evident than in the avoidance by the sacred writers of such specifications as might lead men to attribute some peculiar sanctity to the persons, places, and things connected with the manifestation of the Messiah. Their notices of the life of the Virgin Mary are scanty and incidental; and most of the circumstances recorded are obviously designed to shew that she had nothing to do with Christ in his ministerial office. Localities are indeed mentioned, but they are noticed for the most part vaguely and loosely, as if to discourage all future efforts for their identification. There are no descriptions of our Lord's dress, diet, and domestic habits, because a perverse imitation of such peculiarities might have led Christians to neglect "the weightier matters of the Law;" and though the apostles had far better opportunities to collect relics than any of those who came after them could possibly enjoy, we find no example of their pre-

serving any. From the time of the Empress Helena's pilgrimage, we find these evangelical characteristics of Christianity obliterated in the Eastern churches: priests and monks affected to point out the precise spots where every event recorded in the Gospels took place; the most vague traditions, not unfrequently mingled with intentional fictions, were set forward as the history of those periods and events which the evangelists had passed over in silence, or had designedly left obscure; and lives of the Virgin Mary were composed in which she was almost raised to the rank of a deity. The anxiety to recover the cross on which our Saviour had actually suffered was especially remarkable, from its similarity to that superstition which the pious Hezekiah rooted out of Jerusalem. "Their veneration for the wood of the supposed true cross, has a correspondence approaching to identity with the veneration of the Israelites for the brazen serpent which Hezekiah destroyed; only that the more ancient superstition was one degree less irrational; inasmuch as the image was that which had itself been a more immediate instrument of a miraculous deliverance: whereas what typically corresponds to it in the Christian dispensation, is (as our Lord himself points out) not the cross on which he suffered, but the very person of the suffering Redeemer."

It is probable that many of these superstitious notions and practices had been silently growing in the Eastern churches before Helena's visit to Jerusalem, but it was not until that event that they acquired a strength dangerous to the purity of religion. The

easy credulity of the empress, and her ostentatious liberality to all who offered to gratify her inquisitive curiosity, invited the practice of fraud and delusion; and few can read the history of her pilgrimage without feeling convinced that deception was very extensively practised. From this time pilgrimages began to be regarded as meritorious works of piety, and outward observances were more and more substituted for purity of principle. These evils manifestly arose from an unauthorized system of addition to the history of the Gospel, and it adds one to the many proofs of the important truth that the divine guidance under which the evangelists wrote is manifest, not only in what they recorded, but also in what they omitted. Had they authoritatively related those circumstances which the invention of the Syrian monks supplied, the torrent of superstition would have been irresistible.

Every period of the history of the Christian church which has passed under review, has been found to present peculiar features of danger to the purity of the faith. The narrow tenets of Judaism, the gorgeous but wild speculations of Oriental philosophy, the scholastic subtleties of the Greeks, and the eclectic mixture of creeds and systems in the Alexandrian school, had severally introduced corruption, and scarce was one source of evil closed when another was opened. In like manner, no sooner had Christianity escaped from external dangers by its triumph over paganism, than it was assailed by perils formed within itself, though the germs were derived from a foreign source; it was in danger of becoming a secular

system, instead of continuing "a kingdom not of this world."

While a portion of the clergy debased Christianity and injured their own character by having recourse to pretended miracles and pious frauds, Constantine began to employ force in the extirpation of idolatry. In some instances his zeal was pardonable, if not laudable: the temples of Venus at Aphaca and Helio-polis, where the grossest licentiousness was not only tolerated but enjoined as part of the ritual, was a service required by public morals, and the exposure of the frauds practised in the temples of Æsculapius was a just punishment of knavery; but the massacre of the priests of the Nile, in Egypt, was an unjustifiable cruelty, and should not have received the sanction of those who had recently experienced the injustice of persecution themselves.

The conversion of Constantine not only established Christianity in the Roman empire, but facilitated its progress among distant nations. The barbarians who, since the reign of Gallienus, made frequent incursions into Europe and Asia, carried back religious instructors with the other treasures of the empire: priests and even bishops were to be found amongst their captives; they taught the doctrines of the Gospel to their conquerors, and gave force to their instructions by the patience, mildness, and purity of their lives. It was in this way that the Goths first became acquainted with Christianity; the Armenians had embraced the faith, as has been already mentioned, and their commerce with the Persians enabled them to

make numerous converts in the northern provinces of that empire, in spite of all the hostile precautions employed by the Sassanian kings. In Constantine's own day two new kingdoms received the light of Christian truth, Ethiopia and Iberia, under circumstances of very peculiar interest.

A philosopher named Metrodorus was the indirect cause of the conversion of the Ethiopians. In imitation of the ancient usages, he resolved to travel into distant lands, and study the laws and usages of foreign nations. He is said to have penetrated into the heart of India, and to have made himself acquainted with the theology and philosophy of the Brahmins. This is, however, very doubtful, for the name of India was given by the Romans not only to the peninsula of Hindostan, but also to the southern part of Arabia, and indeed to the countries between the Nile and the Red Sea. The account which Metrodorus gave of the wonders he had seen, induced his countryman, Meropius of Tyre, to undertake a similar tour, accompanied by his pupils, Edesius and Frumentius. They visited Ethiopia at a time when the king had resolved to break off all commerce with the Romans. Meropius was seized and put to death, but his two companions were spared on account of their youth, and taken into the king's service*. The king died soon

* There are many circumstances which prove that Greek was the official language of the sovereigns in this part of Africa. There can be no doubt indeed of a fact which is proved by existing monuments, such as the Greek inscription discovered by Mr. Salt in the ruins of Axum, and that which Mr. Gau found in Nubia.

after; but the queen-mother, having become acquainted with the talent and intelligence of the strangers, took them into her service, entrusting to Frumentius the guardianship of her son, and a large share in the administration of the kingdom. He inquired among the merchants who visited the ports, whether there were any Christians, and exhorted them to persevere in their faith; having thus formed the nucleus of a congregation, he erected a church and converted several of the native Ethiopians. When the young king had attained his majority, Frumentius resigned his office; he visited Alexandria on his way home, where he met the patriarch, St. Athanasius, to whom he related his success in converting the Ethiopians. Athanasius successfully exerted himself in persuading Frumentius to return and complete the labour he had so successfully begun; he consecrated him Bishop of Axum, then a flourishing city, though now little better than a heap of ruins, and the church of Ethiopia still continues to be ruled by his successors. It is curious that from the circumstance of the first Ethiopian bishop having been consecrated by Athanasius, that the Abyssinian metropolitans of the present day always obtain a confirmation of their appointments from the patriarchs of Alexandria.

Iberia, now called Georgia, was converted by a captive maiden, named Nino: no authentic particulars of her missionary labours are recorded; but their success is attested by an embassy which the king of that country sent to Constantine, soliciting a supply of bishops and clergy for the newly established church.

From these gratifying scenes we must turn to others of a very different character. The Nicene fathers, in their eagerness to complete their triumph over the Arians, had made the most unsparing use of the imperial authority, and to secure Constantine's assistance, had almost invested him with the dictatorship of the Church. Their error was soon turned against themselves; the friends of Arius procured his recall; his friends shared in his restoration to favour, and amongst others the exiled bishop Eusebius was not only permitted to return to court, but became the chief confidant of the emperor. Letters were sent, commanding St. Athanasius to admit Arius to Christian communion; but the Patriarch of Alexandria firmly refused, and thus provoked the vengeance of the Arian faction.

The first brunt of their resentment fell on Eustathius, bishop of Antioch. He had entered into a warm controversy with Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, whom he accused of corrupting the Nicene creed; whilst Eusebius on his side asserted that Eustathius favoured the Sabellian heresy. Eusebius of Nicomedia resolved to terminate the dispute in favour of his friend and namesake, by an unexpected course of policy. He feigned great anxiety to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; the imperial conveyances and guards were placed at his disposal; he travelled through Asia Minor more in the style of a sovereign prince than a Christian bishop. Having passed through Antioch, where he was hospitably entertained by Eustathius, he proceeded to Jerusalem, and there

convened a meeting of those prelates whom he deemed best suited to his purpose. These accompanied him on his return to Antioch; several bishops unacquainted with the plot met them in that city, and it was resolved to take the opportunity of holding a council. Scarcely were the sittings commenced when a courtesan appeared with a child in her arms, of which she declared Eustathius to be the father. The good bishop demanded that she should produce her witnesses, to which she impudently replied, that the nature of the crime precluded the possibility of witnesses. The Arian bishops asked whether she would swear to the truth of her charge; the oath was administered, and on the unsupported testimony of this infamous woman, sentence of degradation was pronounced against Eustathius.

Such an outrageous proceeding filled the inhabitants of Antioch with astonishment and horror. Many of them flew to arms and declared that they would defend the rights of their bishop by open force. The tumults in the city were so alarming that Constantine deemed it necessary to interfere; he summoned Eustathius and his opponents to appear before the imperial tribunal. A mockery of trial was conceded to the persecuted bishop; but his sentence was predetermined; he was banished into the remote parts of Thrace, and died in exile. Euphronius, a steady supporter of Arianism, was appointed his successor.

Athanasius was the victim of similar injustice. A council of his enemies was assembled at Tyre; sentence of condemnation was pronounced against him,

and he was exiled to Treves. Arius, attended by the imperial officers and a large body of soldiers, returned to Alexandria; but just as he was on the point of consummating his triumph, by being publicly restored to communion with the Church, he was seized with an apoplectic fit and died in a few minutes, not without a strong suspicion of poison. Whilst he was thus protecting the Arians, Constantine issued severe edicts against all other heretics; and to ensure their execution, he invested the bishops with judicial power both in criminal and civil causes.

Though Constantine had taken such an active part in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, he was not received into the Church by baptism until a short time before his death. One cause of this delay appears to have been his anxiety to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan; indeed, Eusebius declares that he was on his road to that river when he was overtaken by the disease which soon proved mortal. Before breathing his last, he revoked the edict for the banishment of Athanasius, and ordered that he should be restored to his see.

The closing years of Constantine's reign had a very injurious influence on the Christian church. From the time that the emperor, instead of superintending, regulating, and directing external ordinances, took an active part in determining articles of faith, giving to a set of opinions all the weight of his authority, and exciting against them all the irritation necessarily produced by efforts to check the freedom of thought, doctrinal controversies ceased to be purely theological

and became affairs of state. Spiritual power was introduced as an element into civil administration, and admitted as a rival of temporal authority. Human passions could never admit the boundary line to be traced between these powers with any precision; there was a constant struggle, whether the state should regulate the belief of the Church, or the Church control the policy of the state. The law, which permitted any persons who pleased to decline the jurisdiction of the secular tribunals, and appeal to the ecclesiastical powers, and which at the same time enacted that the sentences of the bishops, like those of the emperor himself, should be final and without appeal, opened the door to an infinity of abuses. It embroiled the spiritual with the temporal authority; it created a new state within the state, it made way for all the rivalry and jealousy which must necessarily arise between concurrent jurisdictions. It changed the bishops from teachers of Christianity to aspirants for temporal dominion. A brief anecdote sufficiently illustrates the lamentable result. When Alexander, patriarch of Constantinople, was dying, he said to his clergy, "If you wish to choose the most virtuous as my successor, elect Paul; but if you desire to have the support of the most able courtier, give your votes to Macedonius." It needs not to tell that Macedonius was chosen by a powerful majority which triumphed over a feeble minority.

CHAPTER XVI.

PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE SUCCESSORS OF CONSTANTINE.

THE assembling at the Council of Nice marks an important era in Ecclesiastical History; it gave the Christian church a political existence, and to a certain extent rendered it "a kingdom of this world." To check the growth of erroneous opinions, the prelates reduced the doctrines of the Gospel to scholastic forms, which, however convenient as symbols, divested these doctrines of the practical and moral lessons with which they were accompanied in the preaching of Christ and his apostles. Religion was thus made a matter of the head rather than of the heart,—a deduction from reason and authority, not a result of purified affections and enlightened feelings. These consequences were not designed by the assembled fathers, neither indeed were they immediately perceptible in their influence on the Church. It was not until the reign of Theodosius that the great revolution, commenced in the age of Constantine, was consummated; the interval was a period of transition, in which there was a protracted, but feeble struggle of the good against the evil principle. The secular power of the Church prevailed over the state; but soon after, the power of the state was swept away by the invading hosts of the barbarians, and the Church stood alone amidst the ruins of the empire.

Every period of church history abounds with proof that Christ's church is militant here on earth, and that its consummation of final purity and triumph has not yet been obtained. At the same time we must see that in the course of its warfare, the Church has necessarily been compelled to suit its tactics to the circumstances of the age, and that the means employed have only become evil when they were applied to times and events neither contemplated nor foreseen when they were originally devised. Ecclesiastical history, above all others, abounds in examples of the danger arising from the belief, that what has been occasionally beneficial will be permanently useful, and that temporary expedients may be safely changed into fixed regulations. Thus, the supremacy entrusted to Constantine for the purpose of more effectually quelling Arius, served the end designed for the time; but after no long interval, that same supremacy brought Arius back in triumph, and sent Athanasius into banishment.

Distrust in the promise of Christ, that "*He* will be with his faithful followers to the end of the world," has been the great cause of the evils which the mixture of secular power with religious government has produced. In their eagerness to promote what they consider truth, too many ardent Christians have been eager to obtain the aid of physical force, and to advance their cause by forbidden means. In all cases the result has been, that the evil of the means long survives the evil of the object they were intended to remove, and finally becomes a source of far greater

corruption than the original error against which they were directed.

Constantine, at his death, divided between his three children an empire which his own powerful arm had with difficulty sustained against the incursions of barbarians, and against the weakening influence of theological discords, which he had himself too often encouraged. He bequeathed to his heirs the task of repelling foreign enemies, and the office of appeasing religious discord, both of which had consumed his life, and weakened his strength. His numerous victories, in fact, were never decisive; "they resembled," says Silenus, "the flowers in the garden of Adonis, which begin to wither the moment that they bloom;" his intervention in religious disputes had only sharpened the fury of controversy; at his death the Arians had receded farther from the Nicene creed than their founder himself; and their opponents demanded that the orthodox faith should be defended by nice distinctions, and more stringent definitions.

The imperial power, weakened by its division, was a fatal bequest to the sons of Constantine; they neither obeyed his precepts, nor followed his example. The young princes, however, inherited their father's despotic disposition, and his unhappy taste for religious controversy. Unfortunately, both these passions held possession of the throne of Constantinople during the long and melancholy period of its duration.

Scarcely had the eyes of Constantine been closed, when his three brothers, and five of his nephews, to whom he had bequeathed kingdoms and estates, were

massacred by his sons; and thus fearfully commenced the series of murders and massacres by which the Flavian family was exterminated. Two of the late emperor's nephews alone escaped; Gallus, whose sickness promised to save his enemies the trouble of assassination, and Julian, who, by a whimsical chance, was rescued by Mark, bishop of Arethusa, and concealed from his murderers under the altar.

Ambition soon disunited the sons of Constantine; religion, instead of being a bond of union, exasperated their animosities, and placed them at the head of separate parties. Constantius, who reigned at Constantinople, was the great leader of the Arians; Constantine II. supported the cause of the orthodox; Constans had no religion but pleasure; when, however, he became master of the West by the defeat and death of his brother Constantine, he took the side of the Catholics, but more through hatred of his surviving brother, than through zeal for Christianity.

The disputes between the Arians and the Catholics, each of whom had elected a patriarch, flooded the streets of Constantinople with blood; but Alexandria was the chief scene of their contentions, and for a time the entire history of Christianity is little more than a narrative of the struggle for the possession of that see. At the instigation of Constantius, a council was held at Antioch by the Eastern bishops: the Arian party remained behind, when their orthodox brethren, believing all the business concluded, had returned to their sees; after a very brief discussion they proclaimed the deposition of Athanasius, and

elected in his stead, Gregory of Cappadocia, to the patriarchate of Alexandria.

Gregory was afraid to take possession of his appointment without the protection of a military escort; he was accompanied by a body of troops, under the command of Philagrius, the prefect of Egypt, and numbers of the Jews and pagans offered themselves to him as willing volunteers. Thus strengthened, he entered Alexandria, stormed the churches which were closed against him, slaughtered the men, women, and children, who had assembled round the altars, and gave the sacred utensils as plunder to his licentious soldiery. Athanasius escaped the diligent search made for him; but the vengeance of Gregory fell on his innocent aunt. The poor old lady died in consequence of the treatment she received, and Gregory refused her corpse the privilege of Christian burial. Similar scenes were acted in the principal cities of Egypt, and the Catholics complained, with justice, that the Arians were more cruel persecutors than the pagans.

Athanasius, from his retreat, assailed his triumphant persecutors with a pen more formidable than their swords. He addressed a circular letter to the orthodox bishops, in which he compared himself to the Levite who sent the severed limbs of his injured wife through the tribes of Israel; and he excited scarcely less rage against the Arians, than his prototype had raised against the Benjamites. Julius, bishop, or pope of Rome, invited Athanasius to Italy, and promised to support his cause by the united aid of the Western churches.

Athanasius went to Rome: while waiting for the assembling of a council, he preached eloquently on the virtue of celibacy, and the utility of monastic institutions; he thus introduced into Western Europe the passion for monachism and austerities which had already corrupted Christianity in Egypt, Syria, and Greece; the clergy of Rome seconded his efforts, and the few who attempted to make any resistance, were clamoured into silence.

After a long delay, Julius assembled a council at Rome to investigate the charges made against Athanasius; the Eastern bishops refused to attend in consequence of war having been renewed with Persia, though a Persian ship had not appeared in the Mediterranean Sea for several centuries. In their absence Athanasius was honourably acquitted, and intelligence of the decision of the council was communicated in a circular letter to the emperor and the bishops of the East. Constantius paid no attention to the communication, and Athanasius continued an exile for some time longer.

Assemblies of the Eastern bishops continued to maintain the Arian novelties, while similar assemblies in the West repeated their adhesion to the Nicene formularies. At length the Emperors Constantius and Constans agreed to convoke a general council at Sardica; it was attended by a hundred of the Western, and seventy-three of the Eastern bishops, including several of the prelates who had been most eminent at the Council of Nice. It was on this occasion that the first seeds of dissension between the Eastern and

Western Churches were sown, though it was at a much later period that they were separated by a formal schism. The Arians, finding themselves outnumbered, withdrew to Philippopolis, and called themselves the true council of Sardica; opposite decrees and circular letters were issued by the rival assemblies; after which they returned to their several sees, more exasperated against each other than ever.

As Constantius continued to persecute the Athanasians, his brother Constans sent letters remonstrating against his conduct, and threatening an armed interference. Constantius found it necessary to temporize; he invited a deputation to confer with him on the subject, and an iniquitous attempt at fraud on the part of the Arians, induced him for a time to abandon their cause.

Salianus, the ambassador of Constans, was secretly an Arian; but he was accompanied by two venerable prelates, Euphratas of Cologne, and Vincent of Capua. Stephen, the Arian bishop of Antioch, fearing the influence of Euphratas and Vincent, resolved to destroy their credit with the emperor, and employed as his agent a young man, generally known by the nickname of Onagros, or "the wild ass," on account of his violence and profligacy. Onagros sought out a courtesan, and asked her to visit two strangers who were anxious to see her. Accompanied by a troop of his debauched associates, he led the woman to the house where the bishops lodged, and having obtained admission by the treachery of a domestic, he conducted her to the chamber where Euphratas slept.

The noise of her entrance woke the aged prelate; he inquired "who was there," and hearing a reply in a woman's voice, he deemed it an illusion of the devil, and had recourse to prayer. Onagros and his attendants burst into the room with lights; but the courtesan, recognising the episcopal character of Euphratas, cried out that she had been deceived, and bitterly reproached those who had conducted her thither. Vincent and the domestics, roused by the noise, hastened to the room; the woman voluntarily surrendered herself, seven of the conspirators were taken, but Onagros with the rest escaped. A judicial investigation established the guilt of Onagros, and the complicity of Stephen; the unworthy bishop was deposed and banished.

Constantius was so indignant at this base attempt, that he consented to the immediate restoration of Athanasius. That prelate, after an exile of seven years, was restored to his see, and the event was celebrated at Alexandria with truly Christian solemnity; alms were given to the poor, debtors released, enemies reconciled, and solemn thanksgivings offered in all the churches.

But this calm was of short duration; the death of his brother, and the defeat of Magnentius, rendered Constantius sole master of the empire, and he resolved to exert all his power to ensure the triumph of Arianism. Partly by bribes, and partly by intimidation, he obtained from a council at Milan, the repeal of all the former decrees against the Arians, and an indirect condemnation of Athanasius. The bishops

who resisted this abandonment of all principle, were punished by imprisonment and exile; but greater caution was necessary in removing Athanasius, who was strong in the affection of his flock, and had furthermore a promise, confirmed by oath, from the emperor himself, that he should not again be condemned unheard. In defiance of this promise, officers, accompanied by large bodies of troops, were sent to arrest or slay him, and George of Cappadocia was declared bishop of Alexandria in his stead. George, following the example of Gregory, felt no scruple in using the most violent means to obtain possession of his see. Soldiers were introduced into the city by night; the cathedral was stormed while the congregation was engaged in public worship; a terrible massacre of the faithful ensued, from which Athanasius was rescued with difficulty by the devoted heroism of his clergy; they threw themselves between him and the soldiers, forced him out by a private door, and conveyed him beyond the walls of the city. Nor did the evil terminate here: for several days the wretched Alexandrians were forced to endure all the outrages that rapine, lust, and cruelty could suggest to the licentious legions; and similar scenes were enacted in all the episcopal cities of Egypt. Athanasius fled to the deserts of the Thebaid, where he was supported by the monks and hermits. Macedonius, in Constantinople, emulated the cruelties of George in Alexandria, and added to the religious confusion by denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The disputants were not satisfied with words; they had recourse to

arms, the streets of the principal cities of the empire were deluged with blood, and the churches themselves polluted with slaughter.

The dissensions of the Christians revived the expiring hopes of the partisans of paganism. Julian, the cousin of the emperor, had apostatized to the heathen superstitions, and openly worshipped at the neglected altars of the gods. His eminent abilities as a statesman and warrior procured him general esteem; he was proclaimed emperor by his soldiers, and the death of Constantius at the very crisis, enabled him to ascend the throne without passing through the horrors of civil war. From the moment of his accession, he devoted all his energies to the restoration of the worship of the ancient gods; Christian symbols were banished from the imperial standards and coins, and the emblems of the Olympic deities were substituted in their place. To restore idolatry was no easy task; but Julian undertook one still more difficult, its internal reformation. "Pagans had morality," says an eminent writer; "but paganism had none." Julian was forced to copy his moral principles from the very system which he wished to destroy; and it is not without cause that Gregory Nazianzen has called him "the ape of Christianity."

His plans embraced the foundation of schools in all the principal cities; the establishment of lecturers, teachers, and catechists in each temple; the formation of a ritual and liturgy; and the instruction of choirs to sing pagan anthems. He also intended to prepare a code of ecclesiastical discipline; but he found it

impossible to engage the pagan priests in an effort to rival the moral purity of the lives of the early Christians; a purity which revived in the Church whenever Christianity was exposed to difficulties and dangers, but which too frequently faded away in the sunshine of prosperity.

It was the policy of Julian to denounce persecution; he forbade that any injury should be offered to the Galileans, as he insultingly called the Christians, on account of their religion. "They deserve," he says in one of his letters, "our compassion rather than our hate, for they punish themselves; they are blinded on the most important business of life, for they abandon the worship of the immortal gods to honour the tombs and relics of the dead." From this expression of the apostate we may infer that the superstitious veneration of martyrs and their relics had continued to increase, until it had become an abuse which the enemies of Christianity could point at with derision. The emperor further declared, that so far would he be from forcing any persons to conform to idolatry, he would only permit those to join in sacrifice who had expiated their attachment to superstition by penances and mortifications. He was very skilful in turning to his advantage the imprudences into which some of the Christian clergy were led by excess of zeal, affecting to bear their reproaches with philosophic patience. Once, while he was sacrificing at the altar of Fortune, Maris, bishop of Chalcedon, who was blind and broken down by age, caused himself to be led before the emperor, and reproached him in bitter terms for

his impiety and apostasy. "Silence, you poor blind wretch!" replied Julian; "your Galilean god has not restored your sight." "I thank him," said Maris, "that he has spared me the pain of beholding such an apostate as you." The emperor took no further notice of the prelate, but continued the sacrifice.

In the same spirit of affected mildness, Julian recalled indiscriminately both the Catholics and Arians who had been sent into exile during the late reign. He frequently invited the chiefs of rival sects to dispute in his presence, being well aware that such contests would greatly increase the rancour of controversy. Some who penetrated his design refused these insidious invitations; but others, deluded by their vanity, eagerly embraced the opportunities for disputation, and thus afforded occasions of triumph to the enemies of their faith.

A more artful and dangerous attack on Christianity was the edict which prohibited the Christians from giving instruction in science and literature, under the pretence, that the text-books used having been written by heathen poets and philosophers, Christians could not use them without hypocrisy. Julian was well aware that the separation of secular instruction from religious teaching would soon cause the latter to degenerate into ignorant superstition. "The sacred books," said St. Basil, writing against this edict, "are indeed the fruits that feed the soul; but secular arts and sciences are the leaves which serve them at once for ornament and defence." The bishops of that day vigorously opposed this effort to unite Christianity

with ignorance; they could not have anticipated that some of their successors would have adopted the policy of the apostate,—that deliberate fraud should encourage, and pious imbecility canonize, the separation of religious and secular instruction, and even proscribe the latter as dangerous. It would have astonished them had they foreseen that Julian's edict would in a later age be imitated by persons of the highest rank and station in the Christian church.

Though the emperor did not directly and openly persecute the Christians, he subjected them to many vexatious annoyances. He deprived the clergy of their privileges; he taxed them for the repair of the heathen temples; he compelled the restitution of ornaments and vessels which had been taken for the service of the Church; and when Christians appeared as suitors in courts of law, he reviled them for abandoning their principles. The provincial governors and subordinate officers of the empire outstripped their master in zeal; the lowest rabble in the cities of Asia and Egypt gratified their depraved passions by insulting and murdering the Christians, who were virtually deprived of the protection of the law. Several bishops and eminent pastors were the victims of this new persecution; amongst others, George of Cappadocia was murdered by the pagan mob in Alexandria, though the Arians subsequently endeavoured to throw the odium of the crime on the Catholics.

The emperor's attention was diverted from these innovations by the necessity of providing for the Persian war. Before marching against Shah-púr, however, he

gave a singular proof at once of his hatred to Christianity, and his dread of the convincing evidence that attests its truth. The condition of the Jews, like the flaming bush that appeared to their legislator on Mount Horeb, burning without being consumed, has always attracted the attention of every reflecting mind, and has been justly appealed to as a standing miracle by the advocates of Christianity, who found in the Holy Scriptures this singular condition of the Jewish nation predicted with perfect accuracy. Julian, whose early education as a Christian enabled him to appreciate the force of this argument, resolved to destroy its efficacy. He issued, from the imperial residence at Antioch, an edict for the restoration of the temple of Jerusalem, inviting the Jews throughout his dominions to join in accomplishing a work which would restore their name and nation. That enthusiastic people hastened to obey the summons. They subscribed large sums to defray the expenses of the work; women sold their ornaments, and even children their toys, for the purpose; some of the most eminent Jews furnished themselves with pick-axes, trowels, and similar instruments of solid silver, and went to take a personal share in the erection of the edifice. But this plan, devised by a powerful emperor, and seconded by an eager people, was baffled by the dispensations of Providence; Jerusalem and the Jews remained, and still continue to be, signal monuments of the fulfilment of prophecy. When the workmen began to clear away the ruins, in order to lay the foundations for the new building, the ground beneath them was shaken by

earthquakes; flames burst from the fissures of the earth; and a fearful tempest, accompanied by thunders and lightnings, compelled the labourers to desist from their undertaking. Even the pagans, as their own historians relate, recognised the miraculous nature of these impediments, and the work was abandoned.

Soon afterwards Julian quitted Antioch, to lead his troops to the invasion of Persia. The citizens displayed great joy at his departure. They had provoked his displeasure by their zealous attachment to Christianity; he had written a satire against them; and they had answered him by a storm of epigrams and lampoons. From similar feelings of hostility to the true religion, Julian had been led to insult the Christian king of Armenia, at the very moment when the services of such an ally would have been most important. He became the victim of his excessive confidence. He marched into Persia, as if assured of conquest; but the country was wasted before him, and famine compelled him to retreat. The enemy assailed the retiring columns of the Romans with their light cavalry, harassing them by a series of desultory attacks, but avoiding a pitched battle. In one of these skirmishes, Julian received a mortal wound; he was borne to his tent, and expired in the arms of his friends. He was the last heathen emperor; with him pagan idolatry fell never to rise again.

CHAPTER XVII.

FINAL TRIUMPH AND ESTABLISHMENT OF
CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

JOVIAN was tumultuously elected emperor by the army on the death of Julian. His first act was the legal re-establishment of Christianity, which he effected by displaying the standard of the cross at the head of his army, and sending circulars to the provincial governors, professing his attachment to the faith, and his desire for its restoration. He then concluded peace with the Persians, and hasted to return to Antioch, when the greatest confusion was occasioned by the late change in the government. The pagans, struck with terror, trembled at the approach of a prince who, at the very instant of his election to the empire, proclaimed his attachment to Christianity. Several of them, abandoning their altars and sacrifices, and dreading the Christians more than the Persians, fled from their houses and sought safety in retirement. The conduct of too many of the Christians seemed to justify these alarms. The theatres and other places of public assembly echoed their joyous shouts and menaces. They overthrew the altars; they closed the temples; some of them formed plans of more sanguinary vengeance; and the philosopher Libanius, the favourite of the late emperor, declared that he escaped with difficulty from the plots formed against his life. Gregory of Nazianzen promptly interfered to check a

spirit so contrary to the principles of the Gospel; having shown to the faithful their providential deliverance from the dangers with which they were menaced, he exhorted them to forgive their enemies, and not to sacrifice in illegal reprisals the merit of their recent sufferings. At the same time the various sects which had been hushed to silence by the pressure of common calamity, revived their differences when the compressing power was removed, and each hoped to win the favour of the new emperor.

Jovian adopted the wisest means for calming the general excitement: he issued an edict allowing the free exercise of religion to all his subjects; he allowed the temples to be opened and sacrifices to be offered; he prohibited only the practice of magic and enchantments. This liberty produced a double advantage to Christianity; it brought back to the Church those who had only quitted it through fear, and it left paganism in possession of those who would only have abandoned it through hypocrisy. Conviction, the only kind of restraint which true religion recognises, obtained true converts alone, but it obtained them in great numbers, because it had not to encounter the hatred and obstinacy which violence and persecution would have inspired. The philosophers, or rather the pretenders to the name of philosophy, who had crowded round Julian, ceased to frequent the court, though Jovian treated them with all proper respect. An enemy of Libanius endeavoured to persuade the emperor to put the sophist to death, because he continued to bewail the fate of his late master and benefactor; but Jovian

refused to listen to such unworthy counsels, aware that his glory would be less injured by powerless tears than by the blood of the innocent.

Christianity was publicly restored; the bishops returned to their several dioceses, and amongst the rest, Athanasius, after so many years of peril and suffering, resumed his patriarchal functions in Alexandria. The clergy were again granted their ancient civil privileges and immunities, the churches were freed from taxes, and those which had been wantonly destroyed were rebuilt at the expense of those engaged in their demolition.

Jovian was thus honourably employed, when his career was suddenly arrested by death. On his road to Constantinople he slept in a room which had been newly whitewashed, and in which a charcoal fire had been kindled to dry the walls. The mephitic vapour thus produced proved fatal; when his servants came to rouse him in the morning they found him lifeless in his bed.

Valentinian was elevated to the empire on the death of Jovian; he chose his brother Valens for his associate, and intrusted him with the government of the Eastern provinces. Soon after this arrangement had been completed, Rome was disgraced by one of those popular delusions, arising from groundless panic, which so frequently occur in history. A dread of witchcraft and sorcery had been diffused abroad by those who accused Julian of encouraging such practices, and when that emperor was removed, all who fancied themselves injured by magicians prepared to

take vengeance. Apronianus, the prefect of Rome, had lost an eye by some accident for which he could not account, and he attributed his misfortune to the malignancy of sorcerers. So soon as he heard of Julian's death, he ordered all persons suspected of magical arts to be thrown into prison. These unfortunate wretches were afterwards publicly tortured in the amphitheatre, in the presence of the Roman people, always greedy of such cruel spectacles. The extremity of torture forced them to confess themselves guilty of impossible crimes, and to name many innocent persons as their accomplices. Among the victims was a charioteer of the circus named Hilarinus, who was convicted of having used incantation to give his horses speed in the race!

Valentinian favoured the Athanasians, though he refused to persecute their opponents; his brother Valens, on the contrary, became the patron of the Arians, and endeavoured to propagate their creed by force. Athanasius was once more selected as a victim; he was compelled to fly from Alexandria, and conceal himself for several months in his father's tomb. At length Valens, dreading the anger of Valentinian, permitted the aged patriarch to return, and the remaining six years of the venerable prelate's life were spent in tranquillity. The churches of Constantinople, misled by the restoration of Athanasius, believed that Valens was ignorant of the harsh treatment they received from his imperial officers; they therefore elected eighty ecclesiastics to convey to him their complaints. Valens affected to hear the deputies with patience;

but when they left his presence, he ordered his prefect to put them all to death. That officer was afraid to hazard the odium of a public execution, but he bribed the crew to set fire to the vessel appointed to convey them home, and the entire eighty were either burned or drowned. Basil, bishop of Cæsarea, was almost the only prelate in the East who had the courage to resist the attempts of Valens to restore Arianism. When menaced with confiscation and exile by the imperial deputy, he nobly replied, "He who possesses nothing can lose nothing; you can only deprive me of these robes and a few books which constitute my only treasures. I know not what exile means; the whole earth is the Lord's, and may well be my country; it is only my resting-place on my passage to another world; I have long been dead to its joys and its pleasures." Valens himself attempted personally to win Basil over to his side; but his promises, threats, and entreaties were equally vain. In spite of all the efforts of the Arians, Valens allowed Basil to retain possession of his see, but he did not relax in his persecution of the other Athanasians.

In the Western churches, the Athanasians generally had the ascendancy, but Valentinian, though he favoured their cause, did not remove the Arian prelates. Though in most other respects as cruel and sanguinary a tyrant as ever disgraced a throne, Valentinian rarely sanctioned any violation of the edict by which he had secured liberty of conscience to his subjects. Auxentius, archbishop of Milan, was the principal supporter of Arianism in Italy, and on his

death a fierce contest arose respecting the election of his successor. Ambrose, the governor of Liguria, was sent to preserve the public peace; he entered the church and made such an eloquent harangue, on the duties which the bishops had to discharge, and the importance of the functions in which they were engaged, that the whole assembly, Arians and Athanasians, exclaimed with one accord, "Let Ambrose be our bishop!" This extraordinary nomination was confirmed by all parties, though Ambrose had not at the time been admitted into the Church by baptism, but was only a Catechumen: he became the most eminent prelate of the day, and the most strenuous supporter of the Athanasian faith in the Western empire.

After the death of Valentinian and Valens, Gratian, the son of the former, put an end to the persecution of the Athanasians in the East; but he did not venture to remove any of the Arian bishops, for the Goths, who had now become formidable, had embraced their creed, and there was reason to fear that the Arians, if irritated, might invite these powerful tribes to invade the empire. This prudence was not imitated by his colleague, Theodosius, afterwards sur-named the Great; he issued several edicts against heretics, expelled the Arians from their churches, and prohibited their assembling under severe penalties. He then assembled a council at Constantinople, in the vain hope of giving peace to the Church, and when this hope was frustrated, he increased the severity of his edicts against heretics, virtually placing them out

of the protection of the law. Several councils and synods were held in the course of a few years without producing any effect; the political divisions of the empire withdrew attention from ecclesiastical affairs, and the Church presents little worthy of notice until the death of Maximus rendered Theodosius sole master of the empire.

Idolatry still maintained a lingering existence in Rome; the architecture of its temples, the beauty of its statues, the brilliancy of its festivals, and the association of its ritual with the ancient glories of the republic and the empire, gave to it a venerable aspect, which even Christians contemplated with something of reverence. Theodosius resolved on its final abolition; he assembled the senate, and announced that the funds hitherto allowed for sacrifices and other pagan ceremonies, should be withdrawn. Some feeble remonstrances were made, but they were drowned by the applause of the majority, and paganism ceased to have a recognised existence in Rome. Alexandria, notwithstanding all the exertions of the able prelates who had possessed that see, was even more of an idolatrous city than Rome, and when an attempt was made to close its temples, the heathen citizens had recourse to arms. After some smart contests, the sedition was quelled by the imperial authorities, and the Christians took advantage of the opportunity to destroy all the Egyptian temples. Unfortunately some fanatics who took the lead in this movement, extended their hostility to monuments of antiquity; the destruction of which is justly lamented by the artist

and the historian. Similar exertions were made throughout the empire, and the emperor seconded the zeal of the prelates by denouncing the penalty of death against all who made any exertion in behalf of the false gods.

These proceedings were followed by harsher measures, which completely put an end to the public profession of idolatry in the cities and large towns; but the ancient gods were still venerated in the rural districts and villages (*pagi*), and hence their votaries were named "pagans," or rustics. The emperor celebrated the Christian triumph with rites borrowed from the worst times of heathenism; he dragged the most venerated statues at the wheels of his charriot, through Rome, as Achilles had dragged the body of Hector round the walls of Troy. Theodosius was impatient of the slightest opposition to his will. A slight disturbance in Thessalonica provoked his wrath; he ordered an indiscriminate massacre of the citizens, to be perpetrated by his soldiers without any distinction of sex or age, and his commands were obeyed to the letter. This atrocity excited universal indignation; Ambrose, bishop of Milan, wrote a letter to the emperor reprobating his cruelty, and when Theodosius presented himself at the church, the bishop ordered the gates to be closed, and refused him admittance. The emperor endeavoured to extenuate his crime by pleading the example of David; "You have imitated his crime," replied Ambrose, "you must also imitate his repentance." The answer was received as if it had been the voice of inspiration; Theodosius submitted

to perform public penance in the cathedral of Milan, and entreated the congregation to unite with him in supplications for pardon to the Throne of Grace.

The spirit and courage with which Ambrose behaved on this occasion may deserve praise, but he had established a very dangerous precedent, when he took upon himself the office of judge of his sovereign. Still more impolitic was the public humiliation of Theodosius; the imperial crown was lowered before the episcopal mitre, and the Church declared superior to the State. The result of this strange scene fully proved the truth of the ancient aphorism, that the worst consequences have been deduced from examples originally innocent, and even beneficial. The power which Theodosius could safely intrust to the ecclesiastics, became more than a counterpoise to the imperial authority under his feeble successors, and finally absorbed in the Church all the powers of the State.

There is much to commend in the conduct of St. Ambrose; as a Christian bishop he had a right to pronounce on the fitness or unfitness of any person, however exalted in rank, to receive the ordinances of the Church, but in fixing the conditions, regard must be had to the immutable principles on which Christ's kingdom is founded. The precise error of the prelate was, that he conjoined spiritual censure with secular degradation; and the latter, however it may have appeared valuable as an example at the time, was most dangerous as a precedent. The confusion between ecclesiastical censure and secular penalties, was at this period an evil rapidly increasing: when empe-

rors were strong, the Church was made an engine of civil tyranny; and when they were weak, the authority of the State was made subservient to the extension of ecclesiastical domination. Ambrose strenuously resisted the former evil, but he did not perceive the probable prevalence of the latter.

After the death of Theodosius, his sons Arcadius and Honorius shared the empire between them, but their government was merely nominal, and the reigns of both might be described as perfect anarchy. The prelates who resisted the wide-spreading corruption of the period, are not exposed to the imputation commonly brought against them, of having usurped the public authority; the power which they exercised was forced upon them by the urgent claims of suffering humanity. When the imperial palaces were the haunts of profligacy and debauchery; when the courts of justice were only legalized instruments of oppression; when extortion was the sole attribute of magistrates; and when the armies, levied for the defence of the state, existed only for the plunder of the people, nothing but the Church existed to protect virtue and prevent the ascendancy of vice. Ecclesiastical power became the preponderating element in the social system, for the very plain reason, that it was the only element of order which then had existence. The bishops and clergy did not seize on the administration until its proper guardians had fled from their posts; they only took the helm when it was abandoned by the pilots.

It was not to be expected that the prelates, when

compelled to act as censors of wickedness in high places, should always have displayed respect and forbearance to titled criminals. Chrysostom had the imprudence to denounce the Empress Eudoxia, from the pulpit, and to apply to her the odious epithet of Jezebel; Ambrose transgressed his limits in a similar attack on Justina. Chrysostom was deprived of the bishopric of Constantinople, and ended his days in exile; but the people of Milan took up arms in defence of Ambrose, and the emperor of the West was forced to submit.

It is scarcely possible to pourtray adequately the miserable condition of the Roman empire in the interval between the death of Theodosius and the final establishment of the barbarians in the western provinces. The nominal rulers had no will but that of their ministers and favourites. Secluded in the recesses of their palace, they were alternately the slaves of debauchery and superstition; hiding themselves from the light of the sun and from the view of their subjects, they judged, in their ignoble seclusion, that they were powerful because they received homage from their despicable creatures, and that they were strong because their flatterers deluded them with tales of imaginary victories. The favourites were the masters of the empire; the East and the West were equally subject to their sway; the emperors were only the first of their servants.

Under such circumstances, the speedy overthrow of the Roman empire was foreshewn on every side; from every quarter were heard the gusts which herald the

coming tempest. The vessel of the state lay like an immense hulk upon the waters; her masts were gone, many of her planks were started, and her pilots abandoned her helm, as if they believed that chance would conduct her to a haven of safety. At length, Odoacer, who had been the secretary of Attila, commanded the last imperial phantom who ruled over the sepulchre of Rome to resign his empty title, and the Western empire was no more.

Whilst the secular power thus sunk into utter contempt and helplessness, ecclesiastical influence increased with more than proportionate rapidity. The frequent controversies which arose respecting heretical opinions and the extent of episcopal jurisdiction, enabled the bishops to dispense with the assemblies of laymen and inferior clergy. These controversies were also fatal to the independence of national churches. The Romish see, frequently invited to act the part of arbitrator, gradually began to found a claim of supremacy on its judicial functions; and the appellants, blinded by ambition, too frequently encouraged these pretensions, in the hope of obtaining a favourable decision. The corruption of Christianity in its most essential point,—its spirituality,—which necessarily followed from its secularization, had many apparent but delusive advantages, which for a time diverted attention from the obvious evils of a Christian theocracy. The hierarchy preserved the principles of order when all other institutions had fallen into hopeless disorganization; the clergy alone preserved the relics of ancient learning amid the successive floods of bar-

barism which flowed over Europe. But these very circumstances tended to hide the sad decay of inner principle; and, as several of the early Fathers declared, "what Christianity gained as an *establishment*, it lost as a *religion*." The possession of secular power necessarily tended to foster secular motive; and forbidden practice led to the adoption of forbidden principle.

It is impossible not to see that the character of Christian prelates was greatly changed after the legal establishment of Christianity by Constantine; they began to take an active share in state affairs, and to use their spiritual influence for temporal purposes. But power must be lodged somewhere; and when we glance at the history of the period, we can see many reasons why both princes and people were anxious that it should be placed in the hands of the clergy. It would not have been safe for Constantine to have trusted the pagans, who regarded his accession as a public calamity. In the reign of his sons, the clergy and the pagan philosophers were almost the exclusive possessors of learning: they chose the former for their counsellors, as Julian chose the latter, because they were Christians, and he was a heathen. Theodosius and his sons could not have found substitutes for the clergy, as moral agents in supporting the frame of society, even if they had made the attempt. But the people were more directly interested in maintaining and extending the power of the clergy. The entire system of imperial administration had become thoroughly corrupt from its summit to its foundation; nowhere, save in the ecclesiastical courts, was there

any respect shewn to the principles of equity and morality. The clerical body alone afforded any sure protection against tyranny and oppression; in order that it should afford such protection, power was absolutely necessary; and therefore, every fresh assumption of power was not unreasonably regarded as an advantage gained by humanity. It is therefore absurd to accuse the clerical body of usurpation. They did not seize power; it fell into their hands. In very few instances could they be said to seek it; most frequently it was forced upon them by the pressure of circumstances. Had they been usurpers, it would have been possible to assign the date when they seized the reins of power, and traces of resistance from those whom they had removed. But we can find no record of any such thing; and the worst that can be said is, that the prelates took upon themselves the charges of government when they were abandoned by every body else.

While due allowance must be made for the circumstances under which the great body of the Christian clergy assumed secular power and authority, it must be borne in mind that the extenuating circumstances are far from amounting to a full justification of their conduct. Aaron yielded to "a pressure from without" when he erected the golden calf; but he was not therefore guiltless of participation in idolatry. In like manner, the prelates consenting to act as magistrates only performed their duty as citizens; but when they permitted secular authority to be made a part of their spiritual functions, they clearly departed from the

Scriptural rule of a church, and set up a physical domination instead of the spiritual kingdom which Christ established. The nature of the error into which the clerical body thus fell has been generally misunderstood; but the error itself is as undeniable as it was injurious.

The various controversies raised by the heresies of Arius, Nestorius, Pelagius, and some others, led to scenes of intrigue and violence which were disgraceful to all parties. But the evils were not unmixed; the exertions of heretics and schismatics were often serviceable in awaking the slumbering zeal of the orthodox, and inducing them to avoid occasions of scandal. It is not fair to bring the conduct of prelates in that age to the tribunals of the present day, and judge them by the standard of modern times. They lived in an age of great and rapid transition; they were therefore anxious to secure a permanent establishment for institutions which they believed essential to human happiness; and they were violent, because they believed that every moment of delay was fraught with danger.

It is necessary, in examining history, frequently to dis sever the character of a system from that of the individuals by whom it was supported. In many cases, while we are bound to pass the most severe judgments on particular acts, we shall find good reason to speak leniently of the agents. In the instance before us, the departure from sound Christian principle in the secularization of Christianity, cannot be too severely reprobated; and yet many of those who

aided in making the sad change were men of whom it is impossible to speak very harshly. The evil was one of gradual and almost imperceptible growth; and in many cases, the assumption of secular power seemed to be justified by some temporary expediency. But the eagerness with which the excuse of expediency is seized to palliate a departure from principle, is a proof that the principle has no spiritual life in the soul; and the first compromise soon becomes a precedent for a series of similar sacrifices, ending in its total abandonment.

We must consult the early history of the Christian church not only for what we should follow, but for what we should avoid. At no period of its history has the Church realised the absolute perfection which Christ has promised as its full and final consummation. Even in the days of the apostles, "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free" was narrowed by the exclusive principles of Judaism. The gloomy imaginings of the Oriental philosophy succeeded, and for a season obscured the pure light of the Gospel; the nice distinctions of Greek dialectics, and the passion for theories derived from the school of Alexandria, next became the fruitful source of verbal disputes, which were continued until the rancour of controversy raised words to the importance of things. The effect of persecution was not always purifying. The reverence justly due to those who had died martyrs for the truth degenerated into adoration of their relics; the sufferings of those who sought shelter in the deserts and forests suggested or at least diffused the

passion for voluntary asceticism and monkish superstition. It is true that the Fathers of the first four centuries had the light of the Gospel as well as ourselves; but with equal truth, in too many instances, we might add, "the light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The Fathers were men of like passions as ourselves, and, like us, their views and sentiments were modified by the circumstances that surrounded them. The historian must see, that even in their own day they did not always adopt the course that was wisest, and the measures that were most prudent, and he cannot, therefore, recommend the implicit reception of them as guides in modern times.

But even at the period when the establishment of a Christian theocracy was most plainly adverse to the intent and purpose of Christianity—"a kingdom not of this world"—the blessed influence of the Christian system is not less apparent than in brighter periods of its history. What would have been the result had the hordes of northern barbarians found the empire sunk in the decrepitude of paganism? It requires but little exertion of intellect to see, that all elements of civilization would have been swept from Europe, and that the barbarism of Asia would have overspread the earth. "The kingdom which was not of this world" withstood the shock which overthrew the most powerful kingdoms of this world; in the hour of adversity the Christians returned to their original dependence upon the divine promises, for the secular power on which they had vainly relied was broken in their grasp. There was no possibility of vanquishing the

warlike Franks or Saxons, the ferocious Goths, or the savage Huns, by imperial edicts and intolerant proclamations; the preaching of the faithful missionary, the example of moral purity in Christian life, and the unaided efficacy of Gospel truth, triumphed over savage ignorance and ferocity, as they had previously triumphed over the traditions of Judaism, the reminiscences of paganism, and the dreams of Grecian philosophy. But, with returning success, the evil of secularization again made its appearance. In a double sense, Charlemagne completed the work of Constantine: he finally subdued paganism; but, at the same time, he aggravated the evils which had arisen from the blending of temporal and spiritual functions, by treating the Church as if it had been purely a political institution.

CONCLUSION.

CHRISTIANITY placed mankind under new conditions of probation; but it did not change human life from a state of probation into one of absolute freedom from the possibility of error. Its three great principles, spirituality, universality, and unity, were established by the Holy Ghost; but the developement and application of these principles were left to Christians themselves. Thus viewed, we are not to expect in the early Christian churches, no more than in our own, the highest perfection to which Christianity can attain.

“From Adam until Christ, the scheme of man’s redemption was *prefigured*; in Christ’s ministry it was *accomplished*; by the Spirit it was *explained*. From Adam until Christ, the religious knowledge of the world was like the dawning which precedes the sunrise; and from which we infer the existence, and anticipate the approach, of the sun itself. Christ came; but his coming was as when the sun has risen in mist and cloud, and can scarcely be discerned. And then came the Holy Spirit, like the breath of heaven, which blows aside the cloud, and enables us to look upon the source of all daylight, with which we have been gradually blessed. So also our present condition, as a Church, may have some latent connection with futurity, which we shall then only be qualified to perceive, when God shall again manifest himself, and ‘we shall see him as he is.’”

Hitherto Christ's Church has been "*militant* here on earth;" its struggle of probationary warfare commenced with its foundation, and will not cease until "the end of all things" is accomplished. Each successive revelation," says Dr. Hinds, "has been employed in dispersing the error and obscurity with which man has ever contrived to darken the light of the preceding one. But with the progress of each new day-spring fresh clouds have gathered; nor has the Christian dispensation itself escaped. From the earliest controversies, even to those of the present day, disputes have been blindly carried on respecting the Divine essence; by parties alike acknowledging it is incomprehensible, and alike forgetting that God reveals not *himself* properly, but his *will*, to man; that what is said to be a revelation of the Divine nature, is often rather a warning not to seek after that knowledge, inasmuch as it chiefly tells us what God is not; and that what positive knowledge of God is to be found in Scripture, seems to be placed there, like the forbidden tree of Paradise, not to gratify man's presumptuous curiosity, but to try his obedience and to animate his exertion, not as an object of present fruition, but of future reward."

In confining ourselves to the history of Christianity, as distinguished from the history of the Christian church, it has been our object to escape from the many controversies which have arisen from confounding two things perfectly distinct—a religion and an establishment. The latter belongs properly to political history, and Christianity has no political history, though Christian churches have. Our task was,

therefore, completed when we recorded the recognition of the Christian church as a political institution in the Roman empire. The institutions of Christianity are its doctrines, its sacraments, and its "newness of life;" those of the Christian church are matters of government and discipline. But though the history of Christianity in this volume is only brought down to the age of Theodosius, we may gather from the course of the narrative the character of its subsequent course. From the first calling of the Gentiles, it continually advanced, working a moral reformation in general humanity, raising the character not only of its converts, but of the unbelieving society by which they were surrounded. However in subsequent ages churches may have erred, the religion itself has never changed its character, but has continually advanced in bestowing upon men "the blessing of the life that now is," as well as "that which is to come."

Having in the *Natural History of Society* developed the connection between Christianity and civilization, it is unnecessary to dwell further on the subject here, further than to direct attention to the undeniable fact, that the lowest of Christian nations in the social scale, ranks higher than the very first of Mohammedan or Pagan nations. "Although," says Bishop Porteus, "Christianity has not always been so well understood, or so honestly practised, as it ought to have been; although its spirit has been so often mistaken, and its precepts misapplied; yet under all these disadvantages it has gradually produced a visible change in those points which most materially concern the peace and

quiet of the world. Its beneficent spirit has spread itself through all the different relations and modifications of life, and communicated its kindly influence to almost every public and private concern of mankind. It has insensibly worked itself into the inmost frame and constitutions of civil states. It has given a tinge to the complexion of their governments, to the temper and administration of their laws. It has restrained the spirit of the prince, and the madness of the people. It has softened the rigour of despotism, and tamed the insolence of conquest. It has, in some degree, taken away the edge of the sword, and thrown over the horrors of war a veil of mercy. It has descended into families, has diminished the pressure of private tyranny; improved every domestic endearment; given tenderness and humanity to the master, respect to superiors, to inferiors ease; so that mankind are upon the whole, even in a temporal view, under infinite obligations to the mild and pacific temper of the Gospel; and have reaped from it more substantial worldly benefits, than from any other institution upon earth. As one proof of this (among many others), consider only the shocking carnage made in the human species, by the exposure of infants and the gladiatorial shows, which sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month; and the exceedingly cruel usage of slaves, allowed and practised by the ancient pagans. These were not the accidental and temporary excesses of a sudden fury, but were *legal* and *established*, and constant methods of murdering and tormenting mankind. Had Chris-

tianity done nothing more than brought into disuse (as it has confessedly done) the two former of these inhuman customs entirely, and the latter to a very great degree, it had justly merited the name of the *benevolent religion*; but this is far from being all. Throughout the more enlightened parts of Christendom, there prevails a gentleness of manner widely different from the ferocity of the most civilized nations of antiquity; and that liberality with which every species of distress is relieved, is a virtue peculiar to the Christian name."

Another eminent writer, in setting forth the moral superiority of Christianity, over every other system of religion, has justly observed, "that the two grand principles of action according to the Christian are,—the love of God, which is the sovereign passion in every gracious mind; and the love of man, which regulates our actions, according to the various relations in which we stand, whether to communities or individuals. This sacred connection ought never to be totally extinguished by any temporary injury. It ought to subsist, in some degree, even amongst enemies. It requires that we should pardon the offences of others, as we expect pardon for our own; and that we should no further resist evil than is necessary for the preservation of personal rights and social happiness. It dictates every relative and reciprocal duty between parents and children, masters and servants, governors and subjects, friends and friends, men and men: nor does it merely enjoin the observance of equity, but likewise inspires the most sublime

and extensive charity; a boundless and disinterested effusion of tenderness for the whole species, which feels their distress, and operates for their relief and improvement."

"Christianity," it has also been admirably observed, and with the greatest propriety, "is superior to all other religions. The disciple of Jesus not only contends that no system of religion has ever yet been exhibited so consistent with itself, so congruous to philosophy, and the common sense of mankind, as Christianity; he likewise avers that it is infinitely more productive of real consolation than all other religious or philosophical tenets, which have ever entered into the soul, or been applied to the heart, of man. For what is death to that mind which considers eternity as the career of its existence? What are the frowns of men to him who claims an everlasting world as his inheritance? What is the loss of friends to that heart which feels, with more than natural conviction, that it shall quickly rejoin them in a more tender, intimate, and permanent intercourse, than any of which the present life is susceptible? What are the vicissitudes of external things, to a mind which strongly and uniformly anticipates a state of endless and immutable felicity? What are mortifications, disappointments, and insults, to a spirit which is conscious of being the original offspring and adopted child of God, which knows that its omnipotent Father will in proper time effectually assert the dignity and principles of its nature? In a word, as the earth is but a speck in the creation, as time is not an instant in pro-

portion to eternity, such are the hopes and prospects of the Christian in comparison of every sublunary misfortune or difficulty. It is, therefore, in his judgment the eternal wonder of angels, and indelible opprobrium of man, that a religion so worthy of God, so suitable to the frame and circumstances of our nature, so consonant to all the dictates of reason, so friendly to the dignity and improvement of intelligent beings, so pregnant with genuine comfort and delight, should be rejected and despised by any of the human race."

We have already dwelt on the general characteristics of Christianity—its unity, its universality, and its spirituality; but the following summary of its doctrines, given by an ingenious writer, is too important to be omitted.

"It must be obvious," says he, "to every reflecting mind, that, whether we attempt to form the idea of any religion *à priori*, or contemplate those which have already been exhibited, certain facts, principles, or data, must be pre-established; from whence will result a particular frame of mind and course of action suitable to the character and dignity of that Being by whom the religion is enjoined, and adapted to the nature and situation of those agents who are commanded to observe it. Hence Christianity may be divided into *credenda* or doctrines, and *agenda* or precepts. As the great foundation of his religion, therefore, the Christian believes the existence and government of one eternal and infinite Essence, which for ever retains in itself, the cause of its own existence, and inherently

possesses all those perfections which are compatible with its nature: such are its almighty power, omniscient wisdom, infinite justice, boundless goodness, and universal presence. In this indivisible Essence, the Christian recognises three distinct subsistences; yet distinguished in such a manner as not to be incompatible, either with essential unity or simplicity of being, or with their personal distinction, each of them possessing the same nature and properties to the same extent. This infinite Being was pleased to create a universe replete with intelligences, who might enjoy his glory, participate his happiness, and imitate his perfections. But as these beings were not immutable, but left to the freedom of their own will, a degeneracy took place, and that in a rank of intelligences superior to man. But guilt is never stationary. Impatient of itself, and cursed with its own feelings, it proceeds from bad to worse, whilst the poignancy of its torments increases with the number of its perpetrations, Such was the situation of Satan and his apostate angels."

Here we must interrupt the extract, in order to remark that the fall of the angelic intelligences previous to the fall of man, is intimated rather than described in the holy Scriptures; the fact is recorded, but the cause and the attendant circumstances belong to those "secret things," which are probably beyond the grasp of the human mind in its present state of existence. We have been induced to insert this remark from having found some evil arise from want of caution in speculating on the subject.

The author from whom we quote thus proceeds to state the temptations offered to the human race, and their consequences.

“Satan and his emissaries attempted to transfer their turpitude and misery to man, and were, alas, but too successful. Hence the heterogeneous and irreconcilable principles which operate in his nature; hence that inexplicable medley of wisdom and folly, of rectitude and error, of benevolence and malignity, of sincerity and fraud, exhibited through his whole conduct; hence the darkness of his understanding, the depravity of his will, the pollution of his heart, the irregularity of his affections, and the absolute subversion of his whole internal economy.

“The seeds of perdition soon ripened into overt acts of guilt and horror. All the hostilities of nature were confronted, and the whole sublunary creation became a theatre of disorder and mischief. Here the Christian once more appeals to fact and experience. If these things are so—if man be the vessel of guilt, and the victim of misery, he demands how this constitution of things can be accounted for? how can it be supposed that a being so wicked and unhappy should be the production of an infinitely good and infinitely perfect Creator? He, therefore, insists that human nature must have been disarranged and contaminated by some violent shock, and that, of consequence, without the light diffused over the face of things by Christianity, all nature must remain in inscrutable and inexplicable mystery. To redress these evils, to re-establish the empire of rectitude and happiness, to

restore the nature of man to its primitive dignity, to satisfy the remonstrances of infinite justice, to purify every original or contracted stain, to expiate the guilt and destroy the power of vice, the Son of God, from whom Christianity takes its name, and to whom it owes its origin, descended from the bosom of his Father, assumed the human nature, became the representative of man; endured a severe probation in that character; exhibited a pattern of perfect righteousness, and at last ratified his doctrine, and fully accomplished all the ends of his mission, by a cruel, unmerited, and ignominious death. Before he left the world, he delivered the doctrines of salvation, and the rules of human conduct, to his apostles, whom he empowered to instruct the world in all that concerned their eternal felicity, and whom he invested with miraculous gifts to ascertain the reality of what they taught. To them he likewise promised another comforter, even the Divine Spirit, who should remove the darkness, console the woes, and purify the stains of human nature. Having remained for a part of three days under the power of death, he rose again from the grave; appeared to his disciples, and many others; conversed with them for some time, and then re-ascended to heaven; from whence the Christian expects him, according to his promise, to appear as the sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, from whose awards there is no appeal, and by whose sentence the destiny of the righteous and the wicked shall be eternally fixed.

“Soon after his departure to the right hand of his

Father (where in his human nature he sits supreme of all created beings, and invested with the absolute administration of heaven and earth), the Spirit of grace and consolation descended on his apostles with visible signatures of divine power and presence. Nor were his salutary operations confined to them, but extended to all who did not by obstinate guilt repel his influences. These, indeed, were less conspicuous than at the glorious era when they were visibly exhibited in the persons of the apostles. But though his energy be less observable, it is by no means less effectual to all the purposes of grace and mercy. The Christian is convinced that there is and shall continue to be a society upon earth, who worship God as revealed in Jesus Christ, who believe his doctrines, who observe his precepts, and who shall be saved by the merits of his death, in the use of these external means of salvation which he hath appointed. He also believes that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, the interpretation and application of Scripture, the habitual exercise of public and private devotion, are obviously calculated to diffuse and promote the interests of truth and religion, by superinducing the salutary habits of faith, love, and repentance. He is firmly persuaded that, at the consummation of all things, when the purposes of Providence in the various revolutions of progressive nature are accomplished, the whole human race shall once more issue from their graves; some to immortal felicity in the actual perception and enjoyment of their Creator's presence, and others to everlasting shame and misery.

“Despised as Christianity has been by many, yet it has had an extensive progress through the world, and still remains to be professed by great numbers of mankind; though it is to be lamented many are unacquainted with its genuine influence. It was early and rapidly propagated through the whole Roman empire, which then contained almost the whole known world; and herein we cannot but admire both the wisdom and the power of God. ‘Destitute of all human advantages,’ says a good writer, ‘protected by no authority, assisted by no art; not recommended by the reputation of its Author, nor enforced by eloquence in its advocates, the word of God grew mightily and prevailed. Twelve men, poor, artless, and illiterate, we behold triumphing over the fiercest and most determined opposition; over the tyranny of the magistrate, and the subtleties of the philosopher; over the prejudices of the Gentile, and the bigotry of the Jew. They established a religion which held forth high and venerable mysteries, such as the pride of man would induce him to suspect, because he could not perfectly comprehend them; which preached doctrines pure and spiritual, such as corrupt nature was prone to oppose, because it shrunk from the severity of their discipline; which required its followers to renounce almost every opinion they had embraced as sacred, and every interest they had pursued as important; which even exposed them to every species of danger and infamy; to persecution unmerited and unpitied, to the gloom of a prison, and to the pangs of death. Hopeless as this prospect might appear to the view of short-sighted

man, the Gospel yet emerged from the obscurity in which it was likely to be overwhelmed by the complicated distresses of its friends, and the unrelenting cruelty of its foes. It succeeded in a peculiar degree, and in a peculiar manner; it derived that success from truth, and obtained it under circumstances where falsehood must have been detected and crushed.'

"But we may ask further, what success has it had on the mind of man, as it respects his eternal welfare? How many thousands have felt its power, rejoiced in its benign influence, and under its dictates been constrained to devote themselves to the glory and praise of God? Burdened with guilt, incapable of finding relief from human resources, the mind has here found relief from, and peace unspeakable in, beholding that sacrifice which could alone atone for transgression. Here the hard and impenitent heart has been softened, the impetuous passions restrained, the ferocious temper subdued, powerful prejudices conquered, ignorance dispelled, and the obstacles to real happiness removed. Here the Christian, looking round on the glories and blandishments of this world, has been enabled with a noble contempt to despise all. Here death itself, the king of terrors, has lost its sting; and the soul with a holy magnanimity has borne up in the agonies of a dying hour, and sweetly sung itself away into everlasting bliss.

"In respect to its future spread, we have the best reason, 'the sure word of prophecy,' to believe that all the nations of the earth shall in God's good time feel its happy effects. The Voice of Truth has declared

that, not only some favoured nations and countries, but the whole habitable globe, shall become the kingdom of Jehovah and his Messiah, the Lord and his Christ; and that the knowledge of God, as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, shall ‘cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.’ And who is there that has ever known the excellence of the system which Christ has revealed, who is there that has ever experienced the happy efficacy of his institutions, who is there that has ever been convinced of the divine origin, the delightful nature, and the peaceful tendency of his doctrines, but must join the benevolent and royal poet in saying, ‘Let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen.’”

Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
And you, ye oceans, roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole.
Till o’er our conquered nature,
The Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign.

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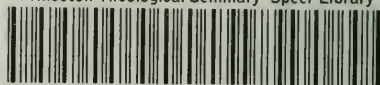




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